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JUNE 3, 1996 • $2.95

# THE NEW REPUBLIC

# DEAD MAN WALKING

## The LONG, SLOW March of BOB DOLE

• • • • •

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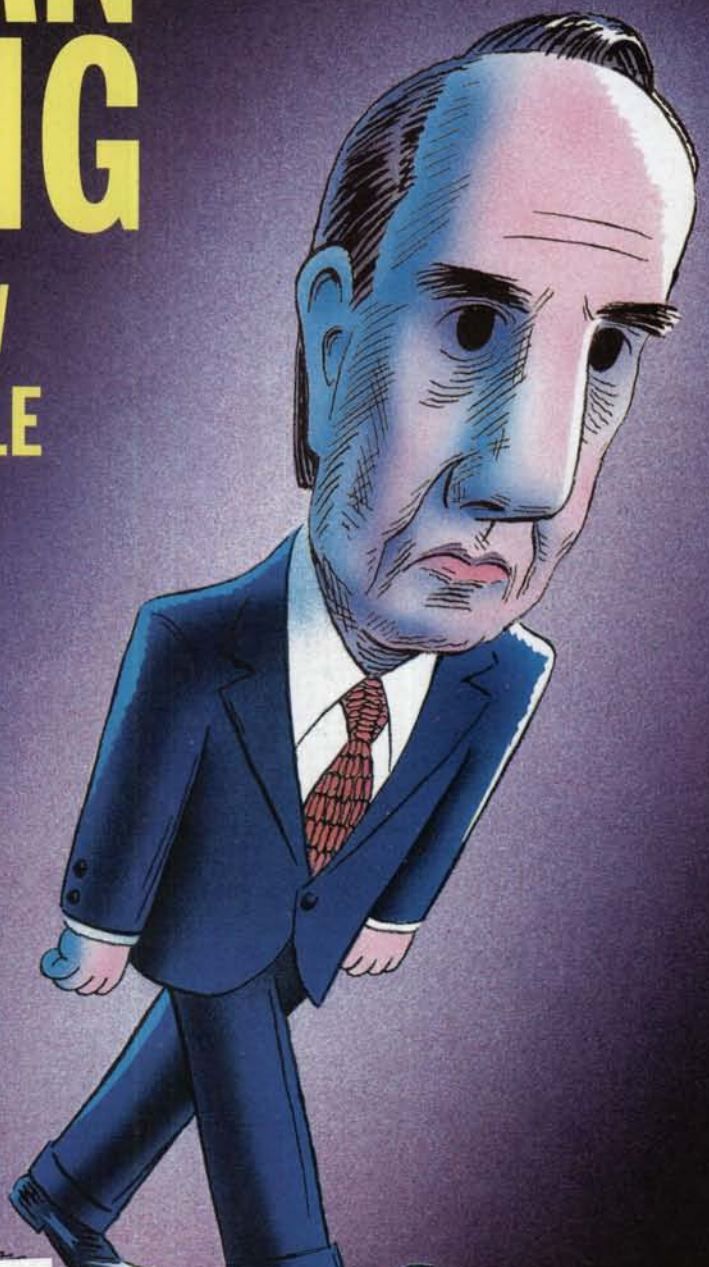

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# THE NEW REPUBLIC

*A Weekly Journal of Opinion*

**JUNE 3, 1996**

**FOUNDED 1914**
**WASHINGTON, D.C.**
**ISSUE 4,246**



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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Worse

**To the editors:**

Unfortunately, Jonathan Rauch ("For Better or Worse?" May 6), in his eagerness to justify homosexual marriages, fails to deal with the wider implications of his analysis. Rauch's three social reasons for justifying and sanctioning heterosexual marriage—bearing and raising of children, taming men and caretaking—also serve as his basis for socially justifying and sanctioning homosexual marriages since such marriages meet at least two of the three criteria. If two out of three criteria are sufficient to justify homosexual marriage then three out of three should be more than sufficient to socially justify the sanctioning of polygamy and perhaps even polyandry. After all, polygamy greatly increases the chances of bearing and raising children, taming men and creating kin for caretaking and would not erode the bonding of heterosexual marriage. In a society in which women outnumber men—especially in the older segment of the population—polygamy is a rational option. How about it editors, Mr. Rauch and your adherents: Are you also prepared to support heterosexual and homosexual polygamy? Polyandry?

SHELDON F. GOTTLIEB
*Mobile, Alabama*

**To the editors:**

To read TRB in your April May 6 issue ("Liberation") is to be reminded, yet again, of the abiding power of fantasy over the human mind, even when the mind is as obviously clever as Andrew Sullivan's.

Sullivan's first fantasy is historical. To suggest that lifting the ban on interracial marriage "did more to proclaim our racial equality than any other measure this century" is surely one of the more fatuous misconstructions of history in recent memory. The ban on interracial marriage was an affront to human dignity and a cause of acute pain to mixed couples in the American South. As a practical matter, however, lifting it did little to improve the lives of all but a trivial number of American citizens, black or white—a stark contrast with the vast impact associated with the abolition of Jim Crow, proscription of discrimination in the workplace and integration of public schools.

The increasing incidence of interracial marriage does indeed symbolize how far America has come in thirty-five years, though hardly in the romantic terms that Sullivan chooses to describe it. It reflects, rather, the rising status of black Americans. Increased intermarriage is much more the effect than the cause of integration. And that integration, in turn, is the result in large part of precisely those measures, such as antidiscrimination laws, which "muscular liberals" like Arendt and presumably Sullivan eschew. In a society like our own, we marry those we know: people with whom we go to school, work, socialize. It is the rise in social equality and economic opportunity for American blacks—and not the symbolic power of racial intermarriage—that makes such contact possible. Hook was right, Arendt wrong.

Sullivan's second fantasy is political. He is dismissive of gay leaders and "panicked Clintonites" who wish to play down the issue of gay marriage. Both groups are, not surprisingly, consumed with the painful memory of the president's ill-fated attempt to repeal the ban on gays in the military. Sullivan seems somehow to believe that the 1993 fiasco was attributable to the incompetence of gay leaders and the Clinton administration. Incompetence there no doubt was, but also irrefutable political math: support among the general public for lifting the ban was diffuse and tepid, opposition focused and ferocious. The same is even more true when it comes to gay marriage; the backlash will make the furor over the lifting the ban on gays in the military seem like a civilized chat over afternoon tea.

Ironically, Sullivan is suggesting that gay leaders and the administration immolate themselves for a cause that, to judge from the polls, ranks rather modestly among the political objectives of most gay people. One can only presume that the great unwashed lack Sullivan's high romantic fervor. True, many of us, straight or gay, spend our lives in search of the one true love who will magically transform our fractured existences into some miraculous whole. But high romantics go further: they see love transforming society at large. It's a pretty idea, rarely more prettily put than by Sullivan in his latest prose-poem. But prose-poem it remains—deeply felt and elegantly phrased but dangerously beside the historical and political point.

JOE BARNES
*Houston, Texas*

## No free lunch

**To the editors:**

One does not have to be a Greek chauvinist in order to find Jonathan Chait's "Washington Diarist" column ("Bearing Gifts," May 6) tasteless. Chait's pretense not to remember the name of Constantine Simitis, the Greek Prime Minister whose address to the National Press Club he had been invited to attend, and his comparing it to the name of some disease ("I think it ends with -itis") was as rude as his statement that he knew it was not Papandreou, which he claimed not to know how to spell. And though, as he says, your assistant editors may deserve credit for checking his spelling, they should also be blamed for allowing his egregious "whom I believe is dead or ill" to appear in your pages.

Mr. Papandreou is actually alive and at home, and Mr. Simitis had a significant and successful visit in the United States. At a time when tension in the Aegean is going from bad to worse, Mr. Chait need not have written a column consisting of piling up one offensive ethnic stereotype upon another. Instead, he could have tried to learn something about Greece and its politics before he attended the free lunch he makes fun of. In that way he might have asked the prime minister the kind of intelligent questions the absence of which he rues. He might have even written an intelligent article on a subject that deserves the serious attention of a serious magazine like yours.

ALEXANDER NEHAMAS
*Princeton, New Jersey*

## For the record

**To the editors:**

In my poem "Basho" that you published in your May 6 issue, two printing errors garbled three sentences. For the record, then, please let it be noted that the third line of the fourth stanza should end with a period and that in the third line of the fifth stanza the phrase "can be followed" should be deleted.

CARL DENNIS
*Buffalo, New York*

## Fault lines

**To the editors:**

Hanna Rosin's characterization of our National Summit on Ethics and Meaning in her piece "Separation Anxiety" (May 6) as a "worry fest" as well as her misconstrual of our Covenant with American Families are perfect illustrations of how liberal pundits like her are out of touch with both the spiritual and ethical concerns of Americans and the natural connections they make between politics and morality.

First, the atmosphere at the summit was the exact opposite of a "worry fest."



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"Elation" would have been a more accurate description. This mood was the result of so many people coming together—over 1,000 more than the hoped for 800—and realizing that they were not alone, that creating a more ethically, spiritually and ecologically sensitive society that moves beyond the selfishness and cynicism of contemporary political discourse is possible.

Second, Rosin's contention that our covenant "confuses" political with moral platforms by calling both for a reduced work week and supporting single people or those in difficult relationships is bizarre; politicians may have separated politics and morality, but that is precisely what has angered so many Americans. In fact, one of the main insights of the politics of meaning is something liberals and conservatives have yet to figure out: that both the political and moral malaise affecting the country have a single cause, which is precisely the dynamic of a society where the market has gone from a means to an end, where people are judged more by the degree to which they can produce material wealth and manipulate others than by the degree to which they help build and sustain a more loving and caring society. Your readers would be better served if instead of off-handedly dismissing our summit you undertook a serious analysis of our ideas.

MARK LEVINE
*National coordinator, The Foundation for Ethics and Meaning*
*New York, New York*

**To the editors:**

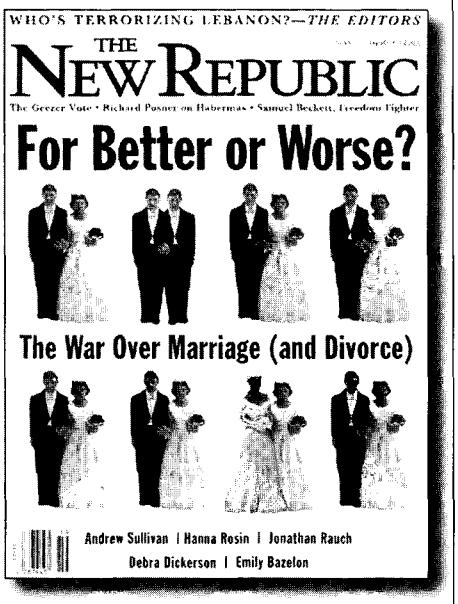
Hanna Rosin's article on the new "pro-family," anti-divorce movement misses part of the point on these important issues. Yes, children raised by one parent alone have a generally harder time, for reasons ranging from economics to parental stress to self-esteem. But a closer look at both kids and research shows that this is true without regard to divorce per se. That is, children of divorce who have and keep the economic and emotional support of an ongoing close bond with both parents after divorce do as well on all measures as children of "intact" families. Conversely, children of "intact" families who have one parent who is absent, abusive or otherwise dysfunctional have as generally hard a time as children of divorce.

In other words, it isn't divorce that makes the difference: it's the loss or absence of one parent from the children's lives—and especially the same-gender parent, which is why divorce is generally harder on boys. As Rosin rightly says, instead of fighting pillows like the fault/no-fault issue, we have to turn policy attention and resources to the real issues of socialization and support of boys and men, as well as girls and women, to strengthen those parent/child bonds both before and after divorce. As a child psychologist and a single father I tell my clients and others: leave the marriage or don't, but don't leave your child.

GORDON WHEELER
*Cambridge, Massachusetts*

**To the editors:**

According to Hanna Rosin, I told her that my colleagues and I were "lost" last year, suffering from "no momentum," since we "family values crusaders" lacked "an enemy." Then, "like a bolt of lightning," a "revelation" came to me: gin up a campaign against no-fault divorce.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For Better or Worse?
The War Over Marriage (and Divorce)
Andrew Sullivan | Hanna Rosin | Jonathan Rauch
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This description is a complete fabrication. I did not and do not think that way, speak that way or act that way.

More generally, Rosin's article reflects a journalistic formula that is increasingly evident in your pages. The formula consists of three ideas. First, make heavy use of sarcasm. Second, suggest that people who disagree with the journalist are motivated by bad faith. And, finally, seek always to demonstrate that the journalist is wiser and more knowledgeable about the subject at hand than are the people she is writing about. This formula is not clever and does not serve your readers well.

DAVID BLANKENHORN
*President, Institute for American Values*
*New York, New York*

**Hanna Rosin replies:**

David Blankenhorn downplays his gift for metaphor: everything I quote him as saying is in my notes, and more just like it. He also colorfully told me the divorce issue came "out of the blue," that it was "not on the radar screen." I did not say he "ginned up" the issue, only that this was the first family values crusade that galvanized both left and right. Blankenhorn is also resorting to a time-honored formula: all journalists are cynics, especially the ones that disagree with you.

## Toy story

**To the editors:**

Your criticism of the Cato Institute for supporting retroactive tax cuts at the same time that it opposes retroactive tax increases misses the point (Notebook, May 6). Every child knows the difference between having a toy taken away and getting an additional toy that is unexpected. As the Supreme Court says: "It is axiomatic that for a law to be ex post facto it must be more onerous that the prior law." *Miller* v. *Florida*, 482 U.S. 423 (1987) (quotation marks and citations omitted). A retroactive tax increase makes the law more onerous and upsets settled expectations; the same cannot be said about retroactive tax cuts.

DANIEL E. TROY
*Washington, D.C.*

## You just don't understand

**To the editors:**

I was surprised by the disparaging tone of your piece on *The New York Times*'s coverage of the Women, Men, and Media survey (Notebook, May 6). You say that newspapers don't "create" the disparity between coverage of men and women, they "merely reflect" it. Isn't the whole point that such creation and reflection are linked, since the media and public opinion are hardly mutually exclusive forces? Why, a quick look at your masthead shows that only about 25 percent of your editorial staff is female. I can't help but think that if it were 52 percent female the tone of your piece might have been different.

AMY STORROW
*Houston, Texas*

## Fill in the blank

**To the editors:**

This is a test regarding Matthew Cooper's article ("Geezers for Grabs," May 6):

1. "Geezer" is to ageism as _____ is to racism.

You may begin.

KENNETH WIKLE
*Calabasas, California*



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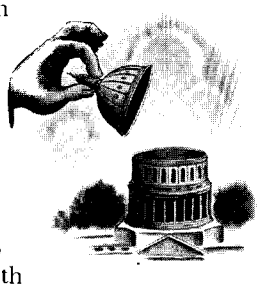
# TRB®
## FROM WASHINGTON

# Nemesis

Foreign policy is commonly described as a prudent balance between *realpolitik* and liberal internationalism. Yet there is a category that elides and eludes this balance, which may be called the diplomacy of sentiment. Loyalty, affinity, malice and paranoia are all sentiments that at one point or another have entered into the calculations of foreign policy makers, either when aiding old friends or battling more recent foes.

In the Middle East, this disposition obtains in U.S. relations with Israel, but also in relations with Iran. Where friendship and loyalty, particularly in the Clinton administration, guide U.S. attitudes toward Israel, a fierce, almost obsessive animosity informs this country's policy toward Iran, one particular, too, to this administration. Yet it is no longer clear that the extraordinary degree of sentiment infusing America's policy toward Iran serves America's interests, properly understood. And it is no longer clear that an absolute wall of American hostility will contain Iran's hostility. Instead, it might keep out precisely those forces of change and moderation that can bring about a friendlier, and freer, regime.

One need not be naïve about the dangers of Iranian foreign policy to suggest that those dangers are better met with dialogue than with isolation. Three years after the Clinton administration announced its "dual containment policy" toward Iran and Iraq, and one year after the president banned all U.S. trade with Iran, the Islamic republic remains as intransigent as ever. Wherever one turns, from aid to Bosnia to nuclear deals with the Russians to arms agreements with China and military cooperation with India—not to mention Tehran's ambitions in Lebanon and Central Asia—Iran seems to be sticking its finger in America's eye. Or so it is perceived in Washington. And this may be part of the problem.

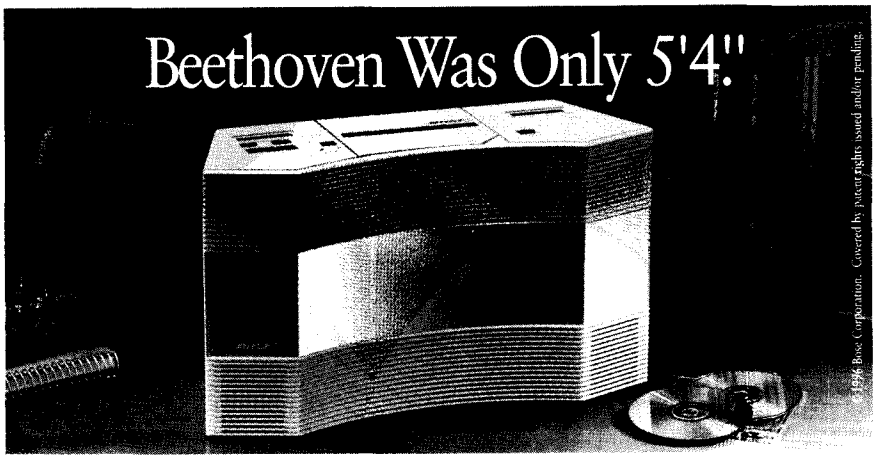


Certainly, much of what Tehran conceives of as its foreign policy is directed at ending America's presence in the region and aiding Israel's enemies. And wherever there is hard evidence for Iranian aid to terrorists the West should remain unforgiving. But, given Iran's extreme rhetoric, it is hard to distinguish the natural behavior of a state of Iran's size, power, history and strategic location from the acts of a noxious, dangerous regime. The question is when it is fundamentalist ideology that is driving Iranian foreign policy and when it is the basic concerns of any regional power. There is a difference between interests and values, even in Iran. Discriminating between these two may enable the kind of "critical dialogue" (in the Europeans' phrase) with Iran that can make it more amenable to the U.S.

Two questions are central to any consideration of a relationship with Iran: What are the forces of reform and moderation, and how can they be helped? When is Iran's foreign policy a legitimate expression of state interest, and when is it terrorism? First, there can be no question that the reality behind the inflamed rhetoric in Iran is one of genuine ambivalence, of a regime that almost twenty years after the revolution is torn between factions in favor of a rapprochement and those militantly opposed to any dealings with America. It is a schism between a permanent revolution and modern reality. The "moderates" will never return to the Shah's alliance with the U.S., but they want to liberalize the economy, and they will tolerate Western television and culture. They are the pragmatic mayor of Tehran and the American-educated mayor of Isfahan, they are Rafsanjani's advisers, they are the majority of the educated population that wants a form of liberalism to take root within the Islamic republic.

For the radicals in the regime, anti-Americanism is a last grasp for legitimacy at home and its only hope for Islamic leadership abroad. The louder they cry, the more desperate their position. But with every American finger pointed at Iran, with every trade agreement denied the moderates, the radicals are confirmed in their worst suspicions, and the moderates are stripped of their standing. And the Iranian people—never haters of America, whatever impressions the pantomime of public demonstrations may have left—are once again robbed of the prospect of normalcy, even perhaps of democracy. The radicals are also the ones pursuing extreme measures abroad, funding Hamas,

*continued on page 45*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THE NEW REPUBLIC

JUNE 3, 1996

# WASHOUT

It doesn't take a brain surgeon to diagnose the District of Columbia's troubles: incompetent city government and lots of desperately poor people. The old solution to the latter—increasing the District's federal subsidy by giving city government more money—has been widely discredited by the former. So, in April, D.C. Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton introduced legislation devising a new solution: increase the subsidy through huge federal income tax cuts. The bill would lower the top rate for District residents to 15 percent—it's close to 40 percent now in D.C., as it is everywhere else—and drop the capital gains tax on D.C. investments to zero. Supply-siders and Beltway residents alike swooned. The chairmen of both the Democratic and Republican congressional caucuses endorsed the plan. Marion Barry pledged support. Jack Kemp opined on its behalf. The editorial boards of *The Washington Post*, *The Washington Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* showered Norton with adjectives like "thoughtful," "imaginative" and "visionary." The House of Representatives plans hearings on the bill in June.

The logic behind it is superficially appealing: a tax incentive for District residents will stem middle-class flight and attract investment. But the most common reasons for leaving D.C. are poor public schools and infrastructure, not taxes. And not only is the subsidy indirect, it's inefficient. Take, as a completely random example, Eleanor Holmes Norton. Norton is going to live in the District whether or not her bill passes. The revenue that the federal government loses by giving her a tax cut is essentially wasted. Suppose, optimistically, that the Norton plan would increase the District's population by 20 percent. That still means that five-sixths of the tax-cut recipients would have lived in the city no matter what, and, hence, each resident lured into the city would cost the government tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue (Norton won't release a revenue estimate).

Contrast that with a well-targeted tax subsidy like the charitable deduction. Certainly, many of the taxpayers who take advantage of this deduction would have donated to charity anyway. But the deduction isn't wasted on them, because the fact that they have given to charity means they have less money and hence less real ability to pay taxes. On the other hand, the mere fact that a person lives in Washington doesn't reflect a lower ability to pay taxes. So the main impact of Norton's tax break will simply be to line the pockets of well-off Washingtonians. Bolstering the District's middle class will be a smaller side effect.

It's odd that politicians who bring home pork through spending projects are considered parochial while those who do it through the tax code, like Norton, are deemed Churchillian. It's even stranger that her colleagues in Congress, many of whom spit contempt for the Beltway as soon as they get back home, seek to bestow special favors upon its residents. There are two arguments for D.C. favoritism: first, the District is in such trouble that it merits radical, even wasteful solutions and, second, that it isn't represented in Congress ("taxation without representation") so it shouldn't have to follow the same rules as the rest of the country. Yet, somehow, plenty of people who could make a living elsewhere choose to live here. Washingtonians are hardly colonists shipping tax dollars to a remote government whose benefits they don't enjoy. D.C.'s economic crisis is no more pressing than those facing Newark, Detroit or South-Central Los Angeles. What distinguishes Washington from these other basket cases is that it is home to the nation's political establishment. Granting it a lower federal income tax rate would create a privileged political class sheltered from the tax burdens shouldered by other Americans, including those in even worse economic pain. Nothing is more likely to incite populist fury.

And that's exactly the point. While Norton and Barry naturally favor any plan that pumps millions into the pockets of their constituents, their conservative allies hope that the D.C. experiment will rile the populace into demanding the same low rates enjoyed by the despised Beltwayites. "What we do for D.C. we must do for the rest of the nation," argued Jack Kemp. *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page urged that "Washington's flat tax would be a proving ground for nationwide tax reform." Of course it would be no such thing. Norton's bill would draw investors to D.C. not because its tax rates would be low, but because they would be lower than elsewhere. The rest of the country would be subsidizing the District. It's the equivalent of the Treasury marching down the streets of Washington dispensing wheelbarrows filled with cash; sure, it would boost the city's economy a little, but that wouldn't work for the whole country. Unfortunately, that seems to be the idea. GOP leaders are already pointing to the Norton plan as a model for their urban strategy. •



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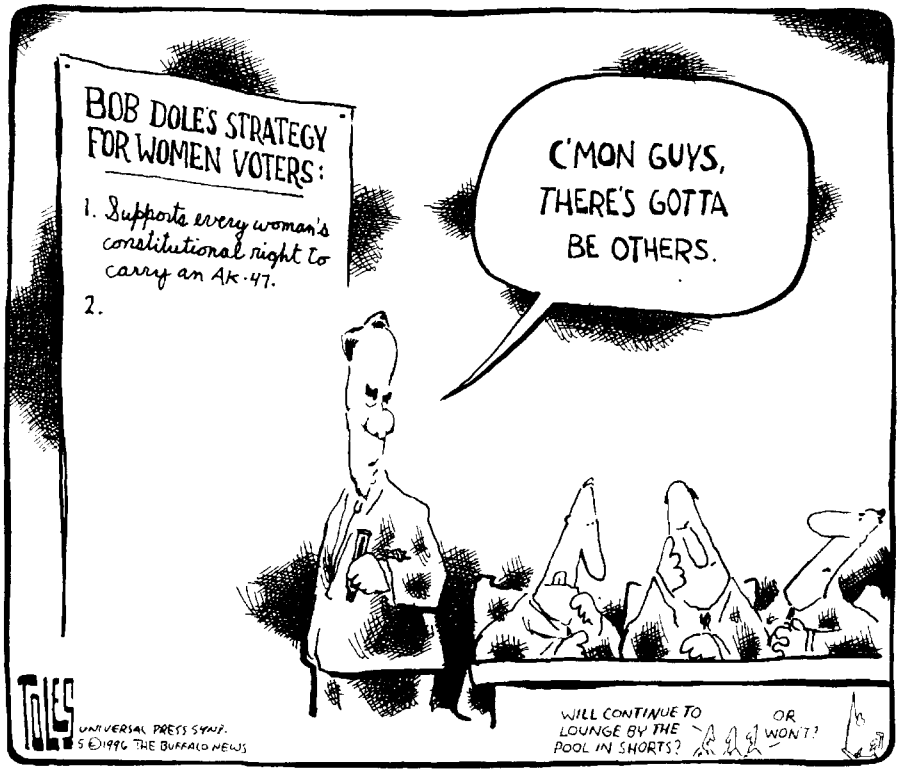
# NOTEBOOK

FEAR OF FLYING: There's no one braver than a whistleblower, like the veiled FAA inspector who testified last month about the agency's shoddy practices. According to *Newsweek*, Mary Fackler Schiavo, inspector general at the Department of Transportation, is such a hero, too. Schiavo's tell-all about the sorry state of airline inspections in this week's issue states, "[T]he more I learn, the more troubled I become." She confides that if there's a thunderstorm with high winds she takes a later flight. Once she saw a mechanic fixing a wing with duct tape, so she got off the plane. That's great to know, but why doesn't she do something about it? The difference between Schiavo and the veiled informant is that she is actually in a position to punish airlines that flout safety regulations and to delay risky flights. Instead she's whipping up mass hysteria and posing for national magazines. But then perhaps she's overcompensating for her boss, Federico Peña, who occupies the other end of the hysteria spectrum. Peña, along with his assistant, David Hinson, former CEO of Midway Airlines, rushed to the site of last week's ValuJet crash to ensure jittery customers that ValuJet is safe and that they fly it all the time. Well, as it turns out, earlier this year the FAA placed ValuJet on special watch after its planes did things like drive off runways and fill with smoke. Somewhere between Peña and Schiavo lies the truth. Why don't they save the public relations blitz until they find it?


BOB DOLE'S STRATEGY FOR WOMEN VOTERS:
1. Supports every woman's constitutional right to carry an Ak-47.
2.
C'MON GUYS, THERE'S GOTTA BE OTHERS.
WILL CONTINUE TO LOUNGE BY THE POOL IN SHORTS?
OR WON'T?
TOLES
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYND.
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DISAGREE TO AGREE: You have to give it to Bob Dole—he's trying his darnedest to distinguish himself from Bill Clinton. But the president, famously all over the place, is a hard person to disagree with. In his speech last week in Omaha (see Matthew Cooper's "The Lieutenant," page 27), Dole promised a "real war" against crime. His cutting edge solutions? Prosecute juveniles as adults for certain crimes and abolish parole for violent offenders. Unfortunately, these innovations are either already in place or fall into the hands of state officials. Dole went on to complain that "He [Clinton] claims he's putting 100,000 cops on the streets, but the real number is only a fraction of that." Yet Clinton's signature on the budget two weeks ago fully funded all of the additional officers. The Clinton campaign's rapid response, it seems, is now so finely tuned that the president can adopt the GOP's position on an issue before the Republicans even formulate it.

FRENCH LETTERS: It's spring in Paris and time again for the French to hand out medals to American "artists." Sharon Stone got her ribbon last year, so why shouldn't such luminaries as Alberto Vitale, the Random House president, the publishers Richard and Jeanette Seaver, and the novelist Thomas Sanchez also become *Chevaliers des Arts et Lettres*? In all, fourteen Americans became *Chevaliers* this year. Meanwhile, France's *Salon du Livre*, its big book fair, was this year turned over to a celebration of *l'écrivain americain*. French newspapers salivated over cultural ambassadors like Bill Buford, the *New Yorker* literary editor, and the writers Bob Shacochis and Sandra Cisneros, who flew in, with twenty-eight other American writers, to enjoy the adulation. *Le Figaro*, in a puff-piece about the greatness of American writing, argued that "Montana has become more literary than Saint-Germain-des-Prés." Such shameless fawning from a country that rails against "American cultural imperialism" and recently attempted to outlaw the word "popcorn."

TEN LITTLE EUROPEANS: The new British strategy toward the European Community is gradually coming into focus: if you can't beat 'em, kill 'em. Last month, John Major's government defiantly fed British beef to Chancellor Helmut Kohl during a state visit. Last week, President Chirac, on a similar trip, was given "British beef, Provençale-style." That's two down, ten leaders to go. •



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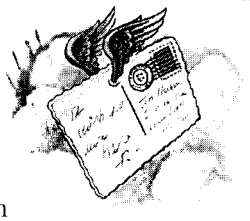
**MANHATTAN POSTCARD**

# COLD STORAGE

*By David Berreby*

"If you go to the information desk, someone can help you," said the woman in beige linen, fending off another perplexed would-be patron of New York's shiny new Science, Industry and Business Library in the old B. Altman building at Madison and 34th this past month. She was indeed a librarian, but, like many of her colleagues on the first day the place was open to the public, she was busy standing in a knot of puzzled people around one of the library's 250 new computers. "It says there are no ports available," said another librarian. "Well, nothing we can do about *that*," said an official-looking man in a greenish suit, waving his slim walkie-talkie.

Most of the terminals worked fine, and the public seemed eager enough ("When we opened at 11 o'clock they just poured in," said one librarian). But the line at the information desk was twenty deep by 1 o'clock. Like a microcosm of informational America, the "SIBL" had divided quickly into a minority—the living, the with-it, the connected, who strode purposefully around—and a majority, wandering uncertainly about like befuddled extras from *Night of the Living Dead*.



The SIBL has about a million books hidden in stacks and shelved in corners, but its corporate-office design—cool beige walls, shiny wood paneling, bright, unpainted steel for the stairs and elevators—emphasizes information machines. There are kiosks with touch-screen guides and maps where patrons can find out library hours and who paid for the place. There are PCs dedicated to specific information services. Even the library's own catalog is accessed through Netscape. In fact, many of the patrons who reached the helpful human beings in their job-interview suits at the curved-wood information desk were referred back to a machine. To sign up for a specific information service, for instance, you have to enter your name onto the touch-screen of a kiosk. You can ask a live librarian a question if you want, but to really use this library of the information age you need to take a class. Any patron can sign up for one. At a kiosk, of course.

In a room filled with computers, darkened so that a projector can show a computer video on the wall next to a little lectern, the opening day 1:15 training seminar got started a little late to accommodate an ABC camera crew. The library's assistant director, a white-haired man with a crisp manner, began showing us the global-corporate ropes. Patents can be researched here, trademarks checked, solid state physics investigated, he said. But you'd better know your way around technology already: "This class will tell you about our resources. It is not a class in how to use a computer. That you do on your own."

It figures. Like the federal government shifting welfare to the states or Apple computer charging users for software it once provided free, the library is making sure it passes costs along. There's a lot of firepower here for those in the know; how you get in the know is your business. I walked into the class because I couldn't make heads or tails of the catalog. It uses Windows, and I don't. Not the library's problem. (Of course, it's not the library's job to teach me to read, either, but reading is something that society felt responsible for teaching me. Computers are another matter.)

After class I had better luck getting onto Nexis, the publication database, because for that you need to use Windows, and Netscape, and the Nexis software, and I'm familiar with two out of three. Next to me a sandy-haired man in a business suit toyed with the mouse that roams through a different database. But he didn't look happy. He managed to snag a librarian and asked her, "Wouldn't you think it'd be a good idea to have staff whose job it was to just wander around and ask the people who look confused if they need help?" "We discussed that," she said, "but it would be awfully expensive."

Later that day I walked six blocks north to the unsnazzy mid-Manhattan branch library at 40th and Fifth, which opened in 1970. Mid-Manhattan is an institutional cube bursting with books—tired old books in library bindings that have tuckered out like an ancient coat and tired new books, the colors of their once-eye-catching covers fading. Lumpy, patient librarians sit at battered metal desks, answering the same questions over and over, taking people by the hand to show them the microfilm readers or the periodicals desk or the phone book. Hairy-eared codgers with nothing better to do read their papers very thoroughly in carrels, while giggling schoolgirls in their uniforms crib reports out of encyclopedias. Old ladies look over *Consumer Reports*, and skulkers linger in the men's room hoping for furtive sex. Not all the purposes to which this place is put are cool or even laudable. And the look, unlike the sleek SIBL's, is practically Brezhnevian. Mid-Manhattan is the library of the past—beat up, multifarious, worn but doughty.

Yet its homely willingness to help the citizens of New York in their pursuits—whatever they might be—touched me in a place that the SIBL leaves cold. Mid-Manhattan looks worn out because it is generous. The older library is the product of a different city, one that didn't tell you you're on your own. In the mid-Manhattan library, you can look up almost anywhere and see an ugly but accurate clock on the wall, telling you what time it is. At the SIBL, there's a noticeable shortage of clocks. It's a '90s building. Get your own damn watch!

DAVID BERREBY is a New York writer.



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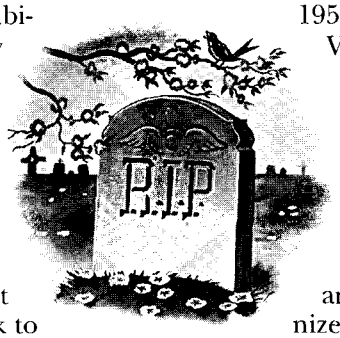
## AFTER YOU'VE GONE

# TRUE BELIEVER

*By Jacob Heilbrunn*

Of all the directors of the CIA, William E. Colby was perhaps the most unorthodox. Named to head the agency in 1973, he moved from presiding over its efforts in Vietnam to exposing its darkest secrets before Congress.

But Colby's ideological odyssey was never as far-ranging as it seemed. He was always a curious mixture of crusading liberal internationalist and Roman Catholic. Something of the whiff of the Grand Inquisitor hung over him. A representative man of the cold war liberalism that imploded in the jungles of Vietnam, he embodied the idealism that, paradoxically, pervaded the CIA from its inception. As the Clinton administration grapples with reinventing the CIA, Colby's legacy offers a reminder of the ambiguities inherent in reconciling democracy with covert action.




Colby, who was born in 1920 in Saint Paul, Minnesota, inherited his idealistic streak from his father, Elbridge. An army colonel who wrote prolifically on history and current affairs, Elbridge Colby was incensed by the murder in 1925 of a black soldier from Fort Benning, Georgia—shot dead when he refused to step off a sidewalk to let a white man pass. In the *Nation* magazine, he denounced the murderer's acquittal by an all-white jury and badly damaged his army career. When William Colby attended Princeton in the 1930s, he imbibed the missionary impulses of Princeton President Woodrow Wilson: "I was a liberal, an antifascist, an interventionist," Colby later recalled.

With America's entry into World War II, Colby satisfied his thirst for military glory and independent action by joining the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). Headed by William "Wild Bill" Donovan, a World War I hero and New York lawyer, the newly founded OSS—until 1941 the U.S. did not even have an intelligence organization—served as the training ground for future CIA directors such as Allen Dulles, Richard Helms and William Casey. In the OSS, Colby carried out a number of acts of derring-do, including parachuting behind German lines in France and Norway.

After the war, Colby, who had worked briefly as a union organizer, became a labor lawyer in New York. His Roman Catholic background had turned him into an anti-communist years before, and the party's attempts to infiltrate unions and Democratic organizations after the war only confirmed that impulse. Like his OSS chums who chafed at working on Wall Street, Colby seized on the cold war as a way out.

With isolationist Republicans dominating Congress, it was Truman and his advisers who embraced the cold war and made the CIA an integral part of the new national security state. Colby himself, in his memoir, *Honorable Men*, recalled that the CIA was widely viewed "as the high-quality, liberal vehicle in the fight against both Communism and McCarthyism." Armed with bags of money for Eastern European freedom fighters and Western European anti-communist labor leaders, Colby and his fellow Ivy League spies were in their element.

Indeed, it was under the Kennedy administration that CIA covert action reached its zenith. Infuriated by the close call of the Cuban missile crisis, the Kennedy brothers urged the CIA to, in their words, "get rid of" Castro. With Khrushchev's emphasis on "national wars of liberation" and the Kennedy administration's determination to pay any price, the CIA began to engage in counterinsurgency tactics around the globe.

No one had more influence over the CIA's operations in Vietnam than Colby. In 1962, as the Kennedy administration deepened America's involvement in Southeast Asia, Colby became chief of the Far East division of the CIA. He had already visited Saigon in 1959 to head the CIA's operations in South Vietnam, where he herded peasants into what were termed "strategic hamlets." More successfully, as part of the "secret war" against the North Vietnamese, Colby also oversaw some 36,000 tribal forces in Laos as they harassed and attacked the supply lines of the North Vietnamese. Unlike his colleagues in the army or State Department, Colby had recognized that the Vietcong could not be defeated by traditional methods of warfare, but had to be confronted with their own methods.

With this insight in mind, he returned to Saigon in 1968 to direct the notorious Operation Phoenix, along with one Robert "Blowtorch Bob" Komer. The aim of this "pacification" program was to root out the Vietcong infrastructure inside South Vietnam. Essentially, American forces gathered information on suspected members of the Vietcong and supplied it to the South Vietnamese army and police forces. The CIA itself did not murder the suspected Vietcong but urged on the South Vietnamese, who often did. Though Colby took much of the blame for it, Phoenix was very much a product of the American eagerness to hand over responsibility for the war to the South Vietnamese, to create a political solution to a military problem.

With the tumult over Watergate and Vietnam, however, the exposure of the CIA's misdeeds was inevitable. After Colby was appointed director in 1973, he began the necessary housecleaning, compiling the agency's shenanigans in a 693-page document that became known as the "family jewels." To the horror of Gerald



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Ford and Henry Kissinger, Colby refused to stonewall the Church committee investigating the CIA, and came clean. As a reward for his efforts, Ford replaced him with the pliant George Bush; inside the CIA, Colby was viewed as a traitor.

Colby's psychological courage and independence in breaking with agency culture can hardly be exaggerated. His was the first attempt to reform a CIA that has yet to be properly reformed. But Colby's own response to the discrediting of covert action was to retreat into the comfortable confines of information collection. "As nations move into this new era of international dissemination of information," Colby claimed, "they will come to appreciate the benefits of the greater knowledge they will gain." In the post-cold war era, however, this has proved to be little more than a pious hope. The truth is that, in a world of disintegrating nation-states, covert actions may well become more, not less, pressing.

The U.S. has never been comfortable with the prospect of creating what Harry Truman feared would become an "American Gestapo." But the specter of a rogue national security state ritualistically summoned up by William Safire a few weeks ago in decrying John Deutch's attempts to rebuild the CIA is a turnip-ghost. The CIA has never been a rogue agency, but a presidential instrument. In the lupine post-cold war world, we may yet return to covert action as an alternative to overt inaction on the one hand and to massive military commitments on the other. If the U.S. remains crippled by the Vietnam syndrome when it comes to covert operations, it may continue to discover that foes such as Iran have already taken its place in assisting friends like the Bosnians. •

**Hyper-nationalism comes to India.**

# CASTE PARTY

*By Akeel Bilgrami*

India has just completed a general election. Its short-term result is thoroughly indecisive—a split between three national forces—but the longer-term trend is clear: the continued growth of chauvinist, elitist Hindu nationalism at the expense of India's secular tradition and its historically disadvantaged communities. Three parties will dominate the next Indian parliament. First is the Congress Party, the party that cast out the British, the party of Gandhi and Nehru and their lesser successors Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and now P.V. Narasimha Rao, the party that, until last week, had won all but two general elections during India's fifty years of independence. Second is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a parliamentary grouping of Hindu Nationalists that has emerged over the last decade with remarkable strength and that is backed by the extra-parliamentary resources of a paramilitary and ideological organization known as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and a cultural and religious propaganda organization known as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). And then there is the National Front-Left Front (NF-LF), an alliance dominated by India's two communist parties and the more centrist Janata Dal, a national party committed to the betterment of the lower castes and to the protection of India's minorities, particularly its Muslims.

The Congress Party fared worse than the most pessimistic forecasts. On the latest count, its strength in Parliament has been reduced by close to half, to about 137 seats. Pre-election speculation, which suggested that a bad showing might lead to the party's breakup, with one half defecting to the BJP and the other to the NF-LF, has turned out to be quite false, even if there was a certain logic to it since the Congress has always been a somewhat artificial aggregate of the Hindu Right and the secular Left. The BJP has won the most seats but remains over 100 short of the 275 needed to form a government. The NF-LF is just behind the Congress with roughly 115 seats. Somewhat like the Islamic Welfare Party in Turkey, the BJP will not be allowed to take power since both the Congress and the NF-LF, despite their differences, agree that secular government must be preserved. The matter will be decided next week, but it looks increasingly likely that the NF-LF will rule, not in a coalition with, but with the outside support of, the Congress and some local parties. A minority government will bring instability, and it is not at all clear that the NF-LF can serve its full term with such precarious and unreliable external support.

It was often said in the last few months that this election, unlike previous ones, raised no issues, that no galvanizing ideas or themes motivated the parties and their leaders. In the 1991 election, the debate over the mosque at Ayodhya, supposedly constructed on the site of a temple to the Hindu god Ram, focused attention on India's fractious religious, communal and minority identities. There was also the (closely related) issue of the Mandal Commission report, which expanded affirmative action to include India's historically disadvantaged backward castes. This time around, these issues have been hushed. The BJP, which had demanded the mosque's demolition, got its way when a mob of its supporters illegally razed the mosque with hammers and axes on December 6, 1992, provoking anti-Muslim riots in Bombay and other areas of the country; since then, it has been soft-pedaling, with transparent insincerity, its aggressively anti-secular rhetoric. In order to win backward-caste votes, the major parties, even those who brought down the Janata Dal government for having proposed it, now claim to accept the recommendation of the Mandal Commission that 27 percent of government jobs be reserved



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for the backward castes. With none of these contentious issues at stake, the conventional wisdom goes, Indians simply voted against the corruption of Congress politicians.

But this diagnosis is superficial. The religious chauvinism and caste conflict that polarized Indians five years ago were central to this election as well, and they continue to haunt India's political future. In the early 1980s, the BJP had only two seats to its name. In successive elections it has gone from two to over 170. To some extent this is due to its organizational and propaganda effectiveness at all levels of the party—precisely the sort of effectiveness that was undermined in its rival, the Congress Party, during Indira Gandhi's rule, with its top-heavy reliance on her autocratic will and distinguished political lineage. But there are deeper causes.

Even more important to the BJP's identity than its hostility to Muslims is the fact that it represents the higher castes of Hindu society. It does not advertise itself this way, of course. But its rise coincides with a perception among the upper castes over the last several years that they must respond politically to a rising sense of lower-caste consciousness.

Contemporary Hindu nationalism has its antecedents in nationalist agitation against the British and has enjoyed a strong hold on certain sections of the Congress Party throughout its history. But it has consistently been an upper-caste movement, depending on a denial of the heterogeneous Hinduism of various sects and cults that existed through the centuries, free of caste hierarchy or doctrinal hostility toward Muslims, from whom there was no great cultural distance. In place of this diverse religious tradition, the upper castes have erected high-caste, Brahmanical Hinduism as the reigning orthodoxy, while resisting (often by co-optation) the various social reform movements that have tried to improve the conditions of the lower castes. These privileged castes, who have dominated Indian society for centuries, have also controlled the democratic politics of the past fifty years. While frequently papered over by inclusive rhetoric, this reality is exposed whenever there is any real threat to upper-caste supremacy. The 1990 decision by Janata Dal leader V.P. Singh—possibly for cynical electoral reasons of his own—to implement the affirmative action proposals of the Mandal Commission was perceived as such a threat. The BJP and the Congress, manipulating public hysteria in a country where competition for places at university and in the bureaucracy is already intense, brought down the government. It was then that the newly empowered BJP distracted attention from the issue of caste equality by raising to a new level its religious and communal propaganda about the specter of the external enemy within—the Muslim minority.

India, the BJP argued, had to reclaim the manly and glorious Hindu past it enjoyed before it was weakened by foreign (first Muslim, then British) rule and then by the effeminate leadership of Gandhi and Nehru and their secular legacy, which has pampered the Muslims. The attack on secularism and the Muslims was manifestly intended to create in the lower castes, just as they were mobilizing for their empowerment, a specious sense of unity among Hindus. The success of the BJP is, to a considerable extent, the success of this ploy.

A recognition of the caste commitments of the BJP leadership might entail the following encouraging thought: given the proportion of upper castes in the total population, the BJP has now won as many seats as a party representing a limited segment of the population possibly can. Even if we count the various commercial castes as now fully assimilated among the upper castes (a process that began some decades ago with the development of capital in the urban centers), the ceiling seems to have been reached. The flip side of this proposition is that the NF-LF has much more room to grow. After all, their claimed constituency of the untouchables, the backward castes, the tribals, the Muslims and the working people of the country generally adds up to a far larger proportion of the population than the party's seats indicate.

These twin thoughts are, of course, too simple. The BJP has been able, for example, to exploit the Hindu ethos among the lower castes of many areas, especially in the North and the West. And it has tended to align itself with local parties, such as the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, which have successfully used short-term incentives and xenophobic propaganda to gain support of the lower castes. The BJP has also been cynically willing to gain backward-caste support by fielding candidates from those castes in areas where they are dominant, such as in Bihar, even though such candidates do not tend to wield any power within the party.

Western newspapers (and indeed self-congratulatory Indian ones) ritualistically throw India a bouquet every five years during elections for sustaining the world's largest democracy. This year's elections, overseen by an especially stern commissioner, have indeed been a model of peaceful and fair polling. But a democracy's health turns on more than the formal process of balloting. It depends on the ability of people who participate in democratic institutions to see through the illusions those institutions can sometimes foster about voters' real interests. In India, that would mean proving that the BJP has reached the limits of its popularity. That is no easy task. The NF-LF minority government, which is almost certain to be installed now, may well fail to survive its first term in office, and the BJP may exploit that failure to make even more gains. It is one of democracy's paradoxes that even if that happens through peaceful and fair elections, we shall still be left with the feeling that the bouquets are not fully deserved.

AKEEL BILGRAMI is Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University and the Chairman of its Philosophy Department.



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# Applaud.

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New and previously uncollected translations illustrate the evolution of music criticism across three centuries in this unique anthology with essays by such acclaimed composers as Debussy, Berlioz and Tchaikovsky. *(Princeton University Press)*
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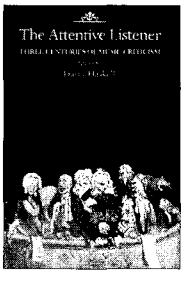

**Speak Low (When You Speak Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya**
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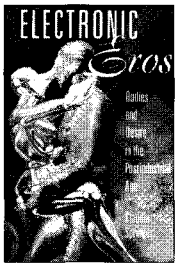


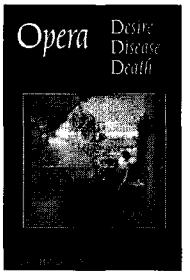


**Opera: Desire, Disease, Death**
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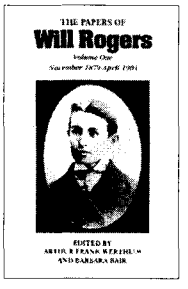


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**Dinner with Dole's economists.**

# NERDS

*By Matthew Miller*

While Bob Dole panders to the cameras on gas taxes, a more serious, less public effort to flesh out his economic agenda is underway. On May 8, Dole brought in his emerging kitchen cabinet of senators and economists for a working dinner on ways to improve the economy's long-term performance. Joining Dole in his Capitol conference room were Senate budget chief and longtime ally Pete Domenici of New Mexico; freshman Robert Bennett of Utah, who made a fortune selling Filofax-style organizers before turning to politics, and whose real-world success Dole esteems; and ex-banker Connie Mack of Florida, who keeps tabs on the Fed's war on inflation from his perch as chairman of the Joint Economic Committee. Also sitting in were Don Nickles, the hard-right Oklahoman who's close to Big Oil and interested in Social Security reform; and Al D'Amato and freshman Spencer Abraham, from the electoral battlegrounds of New York and Michigan.

As the senators fed on chicken and ribs from Rockland's, a popular Washington barbecue joint, six economists served up five-minute presentations, kicking off a lively three-hour exchange. Though participants won't talk specifics, the meeting centered, unsurprisingly, on ways to boost growth.

Who are the economists Dole is looking to, and what clues do they offer to a Dole campaign and presidency? Most prominent is Harvard's Martin Feldstein, president of the prestigious National Bureau of Economic Research. Feldstein gained national attention as Ronald Reagan's second chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA), where his outspoken opposition to Reagan's soaring budget deficits landed him in hot water with the administration.

Feldstein's troubles began right after he arrived in 1982, when he issued very conservative economic forecasts to govern budget projections. He played it cautious to safeguard his own credibility and salvage the administration's, whose infamous "rosy scenarios" had already rendered its pronouncements suspect. Lowballing growth, of course, made Reagan's red ink look horrible in the years ahead, earning Feldstein the nickname "Dr. Gloom." Worse, his public espousal of tax increases and cuts in Social Security cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) infuriated Treasury secretary and all-around egomaniac Donald Regan, who resented Feldstein's challenge to Treasury's traditional role as lead spokesman on the economy. Regan told Congress that the CEA's 1984 economic report "should be thrown in the trash can" and helped force Feldstein out later that year.

But Feldstein is an equal opportunity spoiler. He says that Clinton's 1993 tax increase on top earners didn't deliver the revenue the administration claims. He's argued for years that a low national savings rate is among our chief economic problems and that Social Security makes things worse by keeping people from saving for their own retirements. A recent Feldstein *Wall Street Journal* article called for privatizing the system, though he fudged the difficult question of how we'd get from here to there. He wants lower capital gains taxes and has questioned policies, like the home mortgage deduction, that divert an undue portion of national investment into housing. All this makes Feldstein a solid, not wild-eyed, conservative who'd urge a fresh round of reform on many of the causes Dole himself has championed and would inherit. Dole, after all, is a budget-balancer, likes capital gains relief and helped save Social Security last time in 1983, even while leading the GOP Senate in gutsy votes to shave COLAs two years later.

Also at the meeting was Gary Becker of the University of Chicago and the Hoover Institution. Since Milton Friedman's retirement and the passing of leading conservative economist George Stigler, Becker has assumed leadership of the influential "Chicago school." Apart from sharing its general preference for laissez faire everywhere, Becker, who won the Nobel Prize in 1992, made his name with research on "human capital," applying economic analysis to everything from education to marriage. Needless to say, this work seems a little academic for Bob Dole's tastes. It was for some academics, too; in 1974, in fact, Becker's work inspired a laugh-out-loud parody on "The Economics of Brushing Your Teeth," written by young Princeton economist (later Clinton CEA and Federal Reserve official) Alan Blinder.

Like most conservatives, Becker wants to reduce marginal tax rates, control federal spending and limit regulation. His human capital fetish fuels an interest in vouchers for inner-city kids and more college loans, though not for broader Clinton-style "public investments" in lifelong learning or tax deductions for tuition. Becker argues instead that, properly measured, our investment in human capital is already quite high. He's lamented the welfare dependency of single mothers and large corporations alike. Interestingly, for a Dole adviser, Becker admits that income inequality grew during the Reagan-Bush years, though he says that if it's the result of higher returns to skilled labor it's a plus for the economy. It's easy to picture the candidate taking up Becker's conservatism with a human face. But Dole would also echo Becker's wariness about throwing money at such problems as shoddy public schools, arguing that they'd benefit more from institutional reforms.

Harvard's Robert Barro is one of those brilliant crazies who seems far too abstract to be whispering much of any use in Dole's ear. Barro's known in the profession



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for his theory of "rational expectations," which holds that government attempts to manage the economy are doomed to fail, since individuals and businesses take policy actions into account in ways that negate their intended effects. While "elegant," these theories often entail assumptions about human behavior that, to put it mildly, are hard to square with Life As We Know It.

Take Barro's contrarian view that tax cuts that increase the deficit don't matter economically. Virtually all economists, as well as pragmatic pols like Dole, believe that deficits hurt us by siphoning off for federal use savings that would otherwise be available for business investment. So it's hard to imagine Dole nodding eagerly when Barro says he can cut taxes and forget about the red ink. Especially when Barro "explains" why: most people are so farsighted they realize that a lower tax bill today means they'll face much higher taxes years hence; so they immediately increase their own personal savings enough to offset any loss in national savings from bigger deficits. (Anyone in your family think like this?) Of course, personal savings declined in the 1980s when taxes were cut, which makes Barro's theory look as silly empirically as it does on paper.

The last of Dole's pointy-heads are Stanford's John Taylor, a rock-ribbed Republican who specializes in monetary policy and served on the Bush CEA; Charles Wolf, a senior RAND economist who brings international expertise, plus a passion for raising U.S. savings to fund business investment while improving our trade balance; and John Lipsky, Salomon Brothers' chief economist, who should be a useful sounding board for Wall Street's sensibilities. Top Dole aide Sheila Burke says the circle will widen to include several not joining last week's dinner. There's Dale Jorgenson, chairman of Harvard's economics department, whose March testimony on the virtues of shifting to a consumption tax caught Dole's eye on C-SPAN. There's inflation hawk and gold standard throwback Wayne Angell, a Dole pal from Kansas who did a stint as a Fed governor before heading for the investment bank Bear, Stearns. And there's George Bush's former CEA chair, Michael Boskin, now back at Stanford.

The Dole nerds certainly have their work cut out for them. After all, if a Republican president had Clinton's record on the economy—unemployment down to 5.4 percent, inflation under 3 percent, a deficit sliced in half, 8 million new jobs, GATT and NAFTA passed and a Dow that's soared 72 percent since the inauguration—the GOP would gloat from here to November. Dole doesn't need a panel of Nobel-winners if all he plans to do is pummel Clinton for raising taxes. Politically, meanwhile, it's not clear whether emphasizing our many long-term problems can trump Clinton's short-term advantages.

Stressing such problems—Social Security's troubles, low savings and investment, stagnant wages—may be just what we need, but it takes a candor that's tough for a risk-averse candidate. Not to mention his advisers. For an articulate bunch, those I reached in Dole's brain trust sure clammed up fast when I asked about the gas tax, which most economists say should be much higher. They don't call it *political* economy for nothing. •

**A Dole case study.**

# THE BILL

*By John B. Judis*

In his long Senate career, Bob Dole rarely introduced bills on his own, but in February 1995, in the wake of the Republican takeover of Congress and his ascension to majority leader, he brought forth his own major piece of legislation: the Comprehensive Regulatory Reform Act of 1995 (S. 343). Speaking before the Senate Committee on Government Affairs, Dole said he was heeding the American people's "message" to "rein in government." Dole's bill would have reined in government, all right: it would have virtually paralyzed federal environmental agencies. The story of how Bob Dole constructed this bill tells a lot about how he operates and about his ultimate priorities. It's not pretty.

After the November 1994 election, several Republican senators planned to introduce legislation to curb regulations, but Dole said he wanted to personally take charge of the effort. Senators usually rely on their staff to write bills, albeit with the advice of experts and lobbyists. But Dole actually recruited C. Boyden Gray, who had parlayed his position in the Bush White House into a job as one of the best-paid business lobbyists in Washington, to draft it. At the time, Gray told the *Congressional Quarterly* he was just drafting the bill as a personal favor to Dole, but his firm's clients included a host of companies that would later champion it, including a coalition of businesses organized by the National Association of Manufacturers and Hoechst Celanese, a Ger-



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man chemical company engaged in a pitched battle with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Gray delivered a draft to Dole before Christmas, which Dole then submitted to other lobbyists for comment. These included Barbara Bankoff, who represents both Siemens Corp. and Eli Lilly, and Henry V. Nickel of Hunton and Williams, a Richmond-based law firm that specializes in fighting environmental regulation and that represented numerous companies affected by the legislation. On January 3, Dole hired Kyle McSlarrow from Hunton and Williams to do further work on the bill. But McSlarrow didn't actually join Dole's staff until February 16. During the interim, McSlarrow, who was in debt from an unsuccessful bid for Congress, raised $16,000 from companies that had a stake in the forthcoming legislation.

Dole introduced the bill in February, and it went to Utah Senator Orrin Hatch's Judiciary Committee. Hatch virtually turned the Senate Judiciary Committee over to the lobbyists. He didn't just invite them to testify. Before marking up legislation, the congressional staff responsible for the bill usually briefs other majority and minority staff members. But in March Hatch invited three lobbyists from Hunton and Williams, Nickel, Turner Smith and George C. Freeman, to conduct the briefing. Senate staff members I queried could not remember this happening before. With Dole's encouragement, Hatch then rammed the bill through the committee without discussion or amendment.

BOB DOLE BY TAYLOR JONES FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

The bill, as written, contained numerous provisions specially drafted to help companies fighting environmental regulation. For instance, as *New York Times* reporter Stephen Engelberg revealed, lobbyists from Georgia-Pacific, the country's largest wood products company, got Dole and Hatch to insert into the bill almost word-for-word language they had proposed. But more disturbing than the individual goodies it bestowed was the legislation's overall assault on environmental regulation. The bill, as drafted by Gray and revised by other lobbyists, would have thrown elaborate roadblocks in the way of the EPA, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) and other smaller agencies. It would have made enforcement of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act impossible.

First, the bill vastly expanded what government regulations would be subject to review and when. In the past, government agencies periodically reviewed major regulations. Dole's bill widened the definition of a major rule from one that cost industry $100 million or more to comply with to a rule that *directly or indirectly* cost an industry $50 million or more. Since indirect costs could cover such things as consumer confidence, almost any rule would now qualify as major.

In the past, the EPA, for instance, reviewed particular clean air standards every five years. Under Dole's bill, any company affected by a major regulation could petition an agency to have the rule in question reviewed. If the government failed to complete the review in 180 days, the regulation ceased to take effect.

The result was that many thousands of government regulations would have immediately become subject to review. That would mean total gridlock for smaller agencies like the Mine Safety and Health Administration (MSHA). The MSHA, which regulates exposure levels on eighty dangerous chemicals and carcinogens, is capable of reviewing no more than ten of these rules a year. If it suddenly had to review all eighty, the agency would come to a screeching halt, and the rules themselves would be moot.

Secondly, the bill narrowly defined the grounds for retaining or introducing a regulation. In the past, the government used cost-benefit analysis to justify some regulations but not others. According to the Clean Air Act, passed in the Nixon administration and renewed under Bush, the EPA is supposed to ensure that air quality standards "are requisite to protect the public health." Similarly, as the Supreme Court interpreted OSHA's mandate in 1981, the agency is supposed to place "the 'benefit' of worker health above all other considerations save those of making attainment of this benefit unachievable."



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The Dole bill decreed that, except in the very rare cases where legislation specifically ruled them out, government agencies would have to justify regulations by using strict, monetized cost-benefit analyses. In the case of pollution standards, for instance, it would have to determine whether the costs of eliminating pollution outweighed the benefits of protecting different kinds of citizens from illness. It would have to determine the relative monetary values of 25-year-olds who might not be affected and senior citizens and children who might be. And it would have to assign monetary values to air visibility near the Grand Canyon. That would mean completely redoing past cost-benefit analyses. But, more important, it would mean opponents of regulation could cloak arguments that undermined longstanding moral commitments by framing them in the pseudo-scientific terms of a quantitative analysis.

Third, Dole's bill would subject these tendentious cost-benefit analyses to three different kinds of review, giving interested parties numerous opportunities to block the regulation. The agency's decision would first be reviewed by a "peer panel" appointed by the president. This group, empowered to veto the agency decision, could include consultants from the affected companies, but it could not include "experts" who were "directly or indirectly" associated with the promulgation of a rule. In other words, it would include people who opposed the regulation but not people who favored it.

If the rule got past peer review, it would head toward Congress, where lobbyists could exert their influence and where it could again be vetoed. If it got through Congress, it could then be appealed to the courts, where judges would make the final decision on whether the extraordinarily complicated cost-benefit analysis had been done correctly. As environmental groups were quick to point out, this lengthy process could lead to absurdities. Not only would the lag-time undermine the government's reaction to hazardous waste spills, but it could lead to cancellation of the duck-hunting season. The Interior Department sets bag limits for each fall's season based upon the migratory patterns it observes only weeks before. (Dole finally amended S. 343 to exempt duck hunters and their prey.)

The Dole bill epitomized the Republicans' perverse response to the November 1994 election. Elected largely because of popular revulsion against Washington and government control by special interests, the Republicans proceeded to turn Congress over to them. The Dole bill brimmed with ironies of its own. Dole claimed to be reducing the size and scope of government, but his legislation would have required new expenditures to conduct cost-benefit analyses. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that responding to petitions would cost the EPA alone an additional $180 million. OSHA's costs could go up more than 300 percent. The Dole bill would have actually made government larger but less effective.

Dole's bill also would have given lie to Republican attacks against the power of lawyers and judges. Rather than limiting their influence, it would have created a bonanza for sharp operators like McSlarrow and Gray and would have made courts the final arbiters of the country's environmental and worker safety regulations. When Dole said that he wanted to stop government from "micromanaging our lives," he didn't include anybody but business owners in the possessive pronoun "our." Under the bill, citizens or workers affected by how a company complied with a regulation could not petition to have it reviewed; only the company could.

Most experts in regulation, including those who had worked in the Reagan and Bush administrations, denounced the bill. Cass Sunstein, a proponent of regulatory reform who served in the Reagan Justice Department, testified before Senate committees that it "would disrupt settled expectations in a way that would make it a kind of 'Full Employment Act' for both lawyers and economists. It would require agencies to perform an analysis that they have probably already undertaken, and therefore it would do little good; but it would give affected persons a new and valuable weapon by which to drown administrators in paperwork."

Sunstein, a proponent of cost-benefit analysis, rejected the Dole bill's rigorous reduction of values to dollars. "Some nonmonetizable values should be acknowledged as relevant," Sunstein said. "For many regulations, cost-benefit analysis is inevitably based on controversial judgments about values, not on pure science. The various goods at stake in regulation—cleaner air, saved lives, reduced health risks, disemployment effects, inflationary effects, and so forth—are quite diverse. They differ not just in quantity but also in quality. They are valued in different ways, and efforts to reduce these goods to a single scale, especially the single scale of dollars, can impair rather than improve analysis."

In June, the bill came before the full Senate. The House had already passed a similar version, but it was less extreme than Dole's, allowing companies to petition for review of new, but not existing, rules. During the debate, Dole displayed little knowledge of the bill's actual contents. The burden of defending it fell upon his main Democratic ally, Louisiana Senator Bennett Johnston, a friend of the oil and gas lobby. As the bill neared a vote, news networks began airing reports about its potential impact on the environment, and Democrats stepped up their opposition.

At this point, Dole began acting strangely. Democrats in the Senate had never threatened to filibuster the bill, yet Dole began charging the Democrats with planning a filibuster, and when they started to introduce amendments he called for a cloture vote to cut off debate. He lost three cloture votes in a row and in July abandoned the bill. It's still unclear why Dole acted so precipitously. Some committee staff speculate that Dole was becoming nervous about being identified with the bill and wanted to get it off the floor. Others think that he simply underestimated the opposition. In any case, that was the end of S. 343. Versions of the bill are still making their way around the Senate, but none of them has



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# WHO ARE THE BEST YOUNG NOVELISTS IN THE USA?

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come up for a vote, and none is likely to in the future. Dole himself has not attempted to introduce new legislation.

What, then, was Dole trying to accomplish by introducing S. 343? Throughout his political career, his actions have always blended general philosophical inclinations with narrow political calculations. His championing of S. 343 appears to have been no exception. As a Kansan whose politics were formed in the '50s, Dole has never been particularly sympathetic to environmental protection. Neither he nor his rural constituents have had to worry about choking on smog or inhaling cotton dust inside a factory. He sees government regulation primarily through the prism of farms and small-town businesses. On the other hand, Dole has never displayed the kind of rigid opposition to environmental regulation that Hatch or Jesse Helms have. Dole not only voted for the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990, he helped shepherd them through the Senate.

Dole seems to have been moved primarily by presidential ambitions. Before each of his presidential runs, he has used his Senate post to position himself for the primary season and gain campaign contributors. Before the 1988 election, Dole swung sharply to the right to outflank George Bush. After having earlier urged negotiations with the Soviet Union, he initially opposed the Reagan administration's INF treaty. He also inserted provisions in tax and spending bills to subsidize potential donors to his presidential campaign, including Archer Daniels Midland, Ruan Trucking and Ernest and Julio Gallo.

S. 343 was part of the same pattern. Sensing that the Republican primary electorate was becoming even more conservative, Dole tried to use his support of regulatory reform to undercut Senator Phil Gramm on the right. He also used his support of the bill to attract contributions. Outside of a tax bill, nothing is better for raising business PAC money than regulatory reform. *Congressional Quarterly* found that, in the first three months of 1995, $28,000 of the $113,900 in PAC contributions Dole raised were from firms lobbying for the regulatory bill. The figures for the year were vastly larger. It's impossible to give an exact number, but, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, Dole got $413,889 from construction PACs and their executives and $440,570 from energy and natural resource PACs and executives in the first nine months of 1995 alone. These are industries that are directly affected by regulatory reform.

It's one thing for a senator to seek the advice of lobbyists in writing legislation. It's quite another to allow lobbyists to write the legislation and supervise its passage through Congress. And it's one thing for an aspiring pol to throw a few tax breaks for contributors into an otherwise worthwhile measure—that's what Dole did in the big tax reform bill of 1986—and quite another for him to sponsor a bill that, if successful, would have gutted the nation's environmental and worker safety laws. Dole's sordid and cynical role in the Republican attack on government regulation belies a candidacy based on strength of "character." •

**CAMPAIGN JOURNAL**

# THE HERD OF INDEPENDENT MINDS

*By Michael Lewis*

"I'm sure once Guns & Roses got as big as they did, the government checked up on it and realized that they didn't have the brains to be a threat to anyone."
—Kurt Cobain

"Don't just stand there, let's go get it. Speak your mind, there's nothing to it. VOTE!"
—Madonna in an MTV promo, shortly before it was revealed that she herself was not registered to vote

*May 6:*

MTV didn't enter politics so much as politics entered MTV. When Republican politicians in the late 1980s made an issue of rap lyrics, and small groups around the country started to agitate for warning stickers on records, MTV decided that politics was a natural way to expand its business. That was the end of 1990. Within two years Bill Clinton was standing before Tabitha Soren and a crowd of teenagers answering questions about his underpants en route to a huge margin of victory with the youth vote. People between the ages of 18 and 29 turned out in greater numbers in 1992 than anytime since 1972, when 18-year-olds first got the vote. It's hard to say how much of this enthusiasm had to do with the music-video people. But it was a nice illustration of the law of unintended consequences. If the Republican Party had been warned in advance that, by attacking musicians they'd be stirring up a dormant, potentially hostile segment of the population, would they ever have listened hard enough to figure out



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exactly what it was that Tupac Shakur was ranting about?

Now MTV has a bus that rolls around the country registering young voters, and I am on it. It is plastered all over with quotes from rock stars and other famous people selected to inspire young people. (Including the above from Madonna; Cobain didn't make it.) As the Choose or Lose bus cruises onto the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle it is a sight to behold: a forty-five-foot billboard for MTV and *Bartlett's Book of Quotations* topped by twenty-two glittering silver stars that stick up from the roof like fairy wands. The interior is a Todd Oldham concoction of maroon wallpaper, leopard-skin carpets, mosaic-tiled cabinets and gilt-framed windows.

Wherever it goes the bus creates its own ecosystem. Today, as every other day, it is quickly surrounded by reporters seeking interviews and politicians trying to get interviewed. A pair of televisions on tall stands drown out everything; they replay at great volume a tape of music videos, journalists explaining politics in simple language and rock stars urging youngsters to vote: "If Snoop Doggy Dogg can take the time out to go deal with the pressure, you can too...." The lonely looking, environmentally concerned candidate for the U.S. Senate who wanders in can barely be heard. "This guy has planted half a million trees personally," shouts his campaign manager over the din.

The noise (the pollution of choice for Generation X) is not quite deafening, but it's close, and it's out of sync with the desultory business at hand. Short lines of students slowly form—one to register, the other to fill in political surveys—between the television sets. Thus do people whom society has deemed insufficiently mature to consume alcohol prepare to set the course of American history. The plurality of students register as independents, bus manager Dave Anderson tells me. If the students are already registered, he says, they are asked to sign a pledge that they will exercise their franchise come November. The pledge reads: "I will rock the system by exercising my right to vote on Nov. 5, 1996 because...." Beneath this is a blank space for the students to fill in. While I'm waiting for something to happen (I'm not sure what) I thumb through some of their answers. "I will rock the system by exercising my right to vote on Nov. 5, 1996 because...."

I'm cool
the shit is fucked up
I want to keep the U.S. "choice free"
Bob Dole is an ass
I care!
I have cable
I want student loans!
I am gay and I want my rights!
I'm the smartest man alive.

A pair of mallard ducks stagger across the campus walkway and into the thin crowd of students, followed by a middle-aged woman on her way someplace with her hands pressed hard over her ears. I'm still waiting for something to punctuate the noisy tranquillity, and finally, barely, it does.

"Choose or Lose *what*?" a voice hollers.

I turn around.

"Choose or lose *what*?" the voice repeats. I spot him: a young man with blond, shrub-like hair, dressed in shorts and sneakers and a baseball cap. He's suddenly gone quiet, but the other fifty or so students milling about the bus are still flashing him odd looks. He notices my interest and hands me a flier. "Get it straight," it reads. "MTV doesn't care about you making a political or cultural choice, instead you are a consumer to be sold to and made money from." Once I finish that one he hands me another. "Let's face it," it says, "if you vote for the lesser of two evils either you are the lesser of two evils, or you are not being represented."

"Who are you?" I ask. He's all alone, a stray Martian who landed here by mistake. And he's got a point.

"You want my real name or my radio name?" he asks. Radio name, I say, out of curiosity. "Clutch," he says, "from Naked Radio."

Naked Radio, it turns out, is a pirate station that broadcasts alternative music intermixed with long programs about local political issues. Within minutes Clutch is explaining in highly technical language—using words like "binary" and "switches"—how his station moves by stealth into an area of town, sets up its equipment and, by sheer force of watts, poaches the frequency of legitimate stations. "If there is an area of town where the station's frequency is weak we can come in and dominate their frequency," he says. "Like, yesterday the station we took over was playing this demo tape, and you could just see it." He places his hands on an imaginary steering wheel. "This guy is driving down the highway listening to his corporate music and then *Bam*! All of a sudden he's hearing the Mamas and the Papas and then me saying: *This is Naked Radio and we're coming for your children!*"

I ask Clutch when I can hear his show.

"I dunno," he says. "We have to, like, switch our frequency, or we're going to get busted. Maybe tomorrow night you might want to check 89.9 FM." Then he adds, thoughtfully, "I don't mind infringing on someone else's frequency. It's a felony I don't mind committing."

And with that we are interrupted, for good, as it turns out. Unkempt rock musicians—from bands called Sky Cries Mary and Goodness—emerge from the Choose or Lose bus, take the stage, and in weak, camp-counselor voices implore the assembled students to get out and vote.

It's hard to explain the odd feeling around the MTV bus. It's not the people involved—they're friendly, enthusiastic and smart. It's the nature of the enterprise, rolling onto college campuses to exhort young people to vote. Not vote *for* something. Just vote. The goal is to get them to participate without suggesting that there is any particular reason to participate, other than to defend the interests of youth, whatever those might be. The semiotics of the enterprise are the semiotics of the '60s—the rally, the Kesey-like bus, the rock



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music—but the spirit couldn't be further removed. It's content-free, a kind of idealism about idealism.

Of course, there is an argument that simply getting young people to vote will lead to some sort of social progress. The rule of thumb is that the percentage of the turnout in national elections directly corresponds to the voters' age cohort—25 percent of 25-year-olds vote, 70 percent of 70-year-olds vote and so on. Politicians know this, the argument runs, and thus cater to the old folks at the expense of the young, with the result that the old person's budget—Medicare, Social Security—has spun out of control. Intent on pleasing people who will soon die, our government takes a shorter view of social problems than it otherwise would. One obvious solution is to seduce youth—those with the longest-term interests—into participating. The way to do that is to get their role models (rock musicians) to insist that they do it. And who better to do it than the corporation that helps to make the rock musicians rich?

But the argument breaks down when you think about how young people actually behave, rather than how the people who seek to motivate them wish them to behave. As the stunning success of the music video shows, the attention span of youth is probably shorter than it has ever been. How many young people do you know who can really conceive of their retirement years? Add to this the oft-ignored fact that young people are being born into the most prosperous economy in the history of mankind—more so even than the American economy of thirty years ago. Far from being powerless victims of a sinister system, young people drive the society in all sorts of mad ways. Their reckless and ever-changing demands send the whole culture reeling back and forth to the great consternation of the old fogies. One of the reasons young people may not be terribly interested in politics, in other words, is that they don't need to be. The world already revolves around them.

As we drive back to the hotel I feel a niggling sense of shame for my doubts about this worthy cause. In many ways it is a fine enterprise. MTV's political interviews are among the most interesting around, unconfined by the constipated conventions of most political coverage. It's the corporate risk-aversion that's so bothersome. Democratic politics, rightly practiced, depends on direct confrontation and commitment to ideas. How can the immediate presence of a corporation using the political system to promote its own interests, nonpartisan in the most market-savvy way, do anything but contribute to the prevailing fashion in political attitude—the detached, ironic and "independent" mode?

We arrive back at the hotel to find, waiting eagerly for the bus, a red-headed, freckled-faced 9-year-old boy. "Is this the Choose or Lose Bus?" he asks excitedly. It is, I say. "Cool. Can I look?" He hops on board, takes a quick peek. Then he races back out into the back of a waiting slate-green stretch Mercedes-Benz with a personalized license plate. QUORUM, it says.

*May 8:*

The Crocodile Cafe in downtown Seattle looks less like a club than a restaurant with an impractically large side room, and it's hard to believe that it sits at the center of anything, much less of youth culture. But it does. All sorts of big rock groups have played here on their way to fame and fortune, and many return just for the joy of it. Nirvana once performed here under the pseudonym Pen Cap Chew for fear that if they used their own name it would incite a riot in the street outside. The club's owner, Stephanie Dorgan, is a former attorney who has become an arbiter of the local music scene. Her husband, Peter Buck, is the guitarist for maybe the world's most successful rock group, R.E.M. By some miracle (an introduction from Tabitha Soren) I have landed in the inner circle of rock music. I feel like a Christian who has been invited to dine with the Buddha.

Soon after I arrive, Stephanie takes me upstairs to her office, where, in between fixing things up for the night, she answers some of my questions about the role of politics in rock music. All of these questions sound stupid and contrived, like almost everything that is ever said or written on the subject. "How did the Presidents of the United States of America decide on their name?" I ask her, thinking that maybe there was some overt sedition intended by the newly famous rock group. She laughs. "It's because they're goofballs," she says. "They were just tossing out crazy names. 'We're All the Chickens You Can Eat,' that sort of thing. They just said, 'We're the Presidents of the United States of America' one night, and it stuck."

Meanwhile downstairs Therapy? is warming up. Therapy?, believe it or not, is the name of a band from Ireland. I join Peter Buck on a raised deck above the crowd and for about the first time in my life feel cool. He points to the floor where maybe 300 people gyrate in unison. "One-third of those people came to get laid," he says, "one-third came to get drunk. But the last third came for the music." Sure enough the audience contains a lot of professional musicians from famous bands I've never heard of, called Foo Fighters, Screaming Trees, Mudhoney and Love Battery. The Presidents of the United States of America would have been there, too, says Stephanie, had they not themselves been out on tour.

The guiding pretense in the pop-music market is anti-market snobbery. The most devastating insult to hurl at a band you don't like is to call it "corporate" or "mersh," short for commercial. The best thing to be is "alternative," which means that your music gets played for a small group of cognoscenti who listen to pirate radio stations. R.E.M. was the quintessential alternative band; Peter Buck spent years playing in obscurity and built a career slowly. Nirvana represents the other bookend—the band raced so quickly from alternative to world-class success that the lead singer blew out his brains. "I'm disgusted with having to deal with the commercial side of our band," Cobain said, shortly before he killed himself in the

*continued on page 26*



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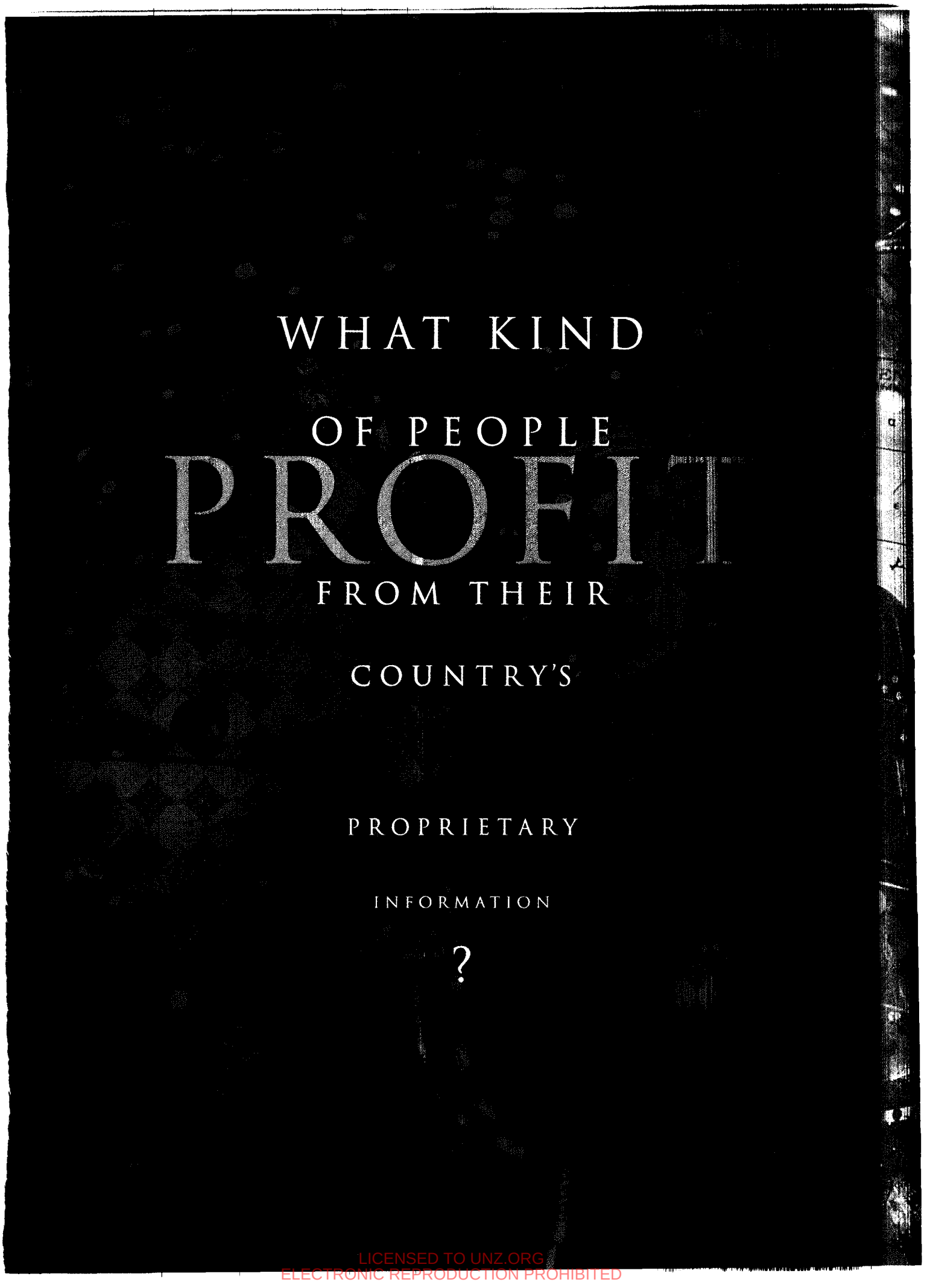


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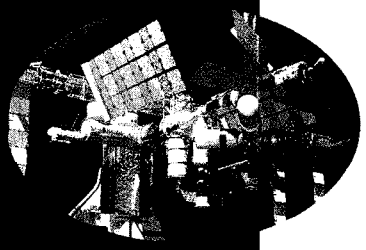
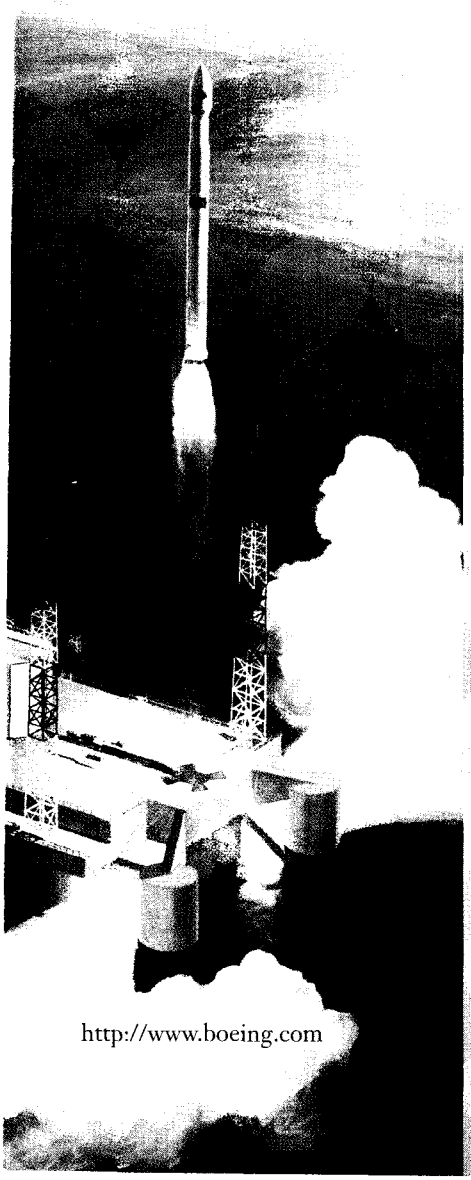


*Right now, countries from around the world are working together to build a home in space, deliver satellites into orbit and protect our peace.*



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There are challenges too great for one country to overcome. There are opportunities so important they must be shared. Today, America, Russia and eleven other countries are working together to build the International Space Station. Companies from Norway, Ukraine, Russia and the U.S. are developing an affordable launch system to deliver critical satellites into orbit. And NATO, Saudi Arabia, Japan and America are cooperating across borders in using an airborne warning system to increase security around the globe. These accomplishments prove that we can use technology to make a better world. But more importantly, they prove that we can work together.

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# ALL KINDS.

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greenhouse of his new $1.1 million home. "Teenage angst has paid off well, now I'm bored and old." The press release for Therapy? is another case study: "We wanted the sound to be a tribute to a pirate radio station," says lead singer Andy Cairns. "We wanted it to be like fifty minutes tuned into our world, and then it's over, and you've lost the reception." Meanwhile, he's hired a publicist to send out press releases. The worst thing you can do if you want to be a serious musician, Peter explains, is to stress your success by, say, turning up for a concert in a white stretch limo. "There aren't any rock stars anymore," he says. "And that's why." This little rebellion against the market masks the essential conformism of the genre. The ambition of every pop singer is to lift one middle finger to the whole world and have the world cheer and hurl sacks of cash onto the stage.

Here at least there is an authentic political connection between rock musicians and their customers. Both, ultimately, feel trapped by the market. If there is one general truth about young life in America it is that it is ever more front-end loaded; the cost to a young person of deviating from the straight and narrow is higher than ever. If you're on the winning side, you land in Goldman, Sachs in the '80s or Microsoft in the '90s and become a millionaire at 28. If you aren't, you might be swabbing floors at McDonalds for half of what your father made at General Motors. It's pretty clear that those who long for "independence" don't know what they want; they just know that what they are being offered isn't it. Maybe one reason for this is that they can't have what they want—a freedom from the ruthless constraints of the market economy. In young life, as in rock, the price of being truly alternative is simply too high.

Soon we are watching three young men jumping up and down and shouting at the top of their lungs. Every now and again the lead singer runs across the stage and shoots a huge greasy globule of onto into the wall. The first time he did this I thought it must be a mistake, but then he did it over and over. A large white glob arced over the drummer's head and onto the wall at the back. "The Pet Shop Boys spat to show that they were indifferent to middle-class values," Peter explains, "but the Pet Shop Boys were middle class. This is a working-class guy from Ireland who is spitting because the Pet Shop Boys spat."

As for the rest, it might as well be a German opera. No matter how I strain, I cannot glean meaning from the spitter's song. In twenty minutes I do not discern a single word, which, given that it was sung in English, is truly extraordinary. After the first number I turn to Peter to ask him the $64 million question: Does *anyone* ever understand the words to these songs, and if they don't does it matter what they are? But before I can ask it he says, "'I want to fuck my mom. I want to fuck my dad.' Their stuff is very Catholic. Very Irish." God knows what else I missed. •

## *All the rage*

Nothing planted the concept of Generation X so firmly in the zeitgeist as the explosion of grunge music in the early 1990s. Like the youth culture it supposedly represented, the music of bands like Nirvana was an apolitical mélange of glum alienation and apathetic cynicism. Since then grunge has been backlashed to death, and young Seattle—Michael Kinsley or no—is becoming better known for heroin than trendsetting. But this election year a new attention to youth politics as panache has burbled into the marketing of both performers and media outlets, and it is frequently both calculated and facile.

A prime example is Rage Against the Machine, a leftist foursome who belt out a whipcrack fusion of punk and rap. What makes them notable is that, in the era of MTV hegemony, no band so doggedly political has hit the mainstream jackpot as this self-styled revolutionary cadre has: Rage's second album, *Evil Empire*, entered the Billboard charts last month at number one, filling a slot routinely held by vacuous Nirvana xeroxes and Snoop Doggy Dogg-ites.

Rage cribs conspicuously from a parade of leftists, socialists and rebels and shouts down enemies from NAFTA to the IMF to the ivory tower: "The present curriculums/ I put my fist in 'em/ Eurocentric every last one of 'em," yelps dreadlocked lead singer Zack De La Rocha. Rage even got kicked off "Saturday Night Live" for planning a denunciation of guest-host Steve Forbes.

This fever-pitched crusading has caught on. MTV News cheered the band's "intense political sensibility which extends way beyond issue-oriented lyrics" to pamphleting at concerts and flogging books by lefty thinkers from Chomsky to Marx. A typical "Rage page" on the Web exhorts: "WAKE UP PEOPLE!!! DO SOMETHING, EVEN IF IT SUCKS, REGISTER TO VOTE BY CLICKING HERE."

As always with the marketing of rebellion, there are some unfortunate contradictions. "GE is gonna flex and try and annex the truth," De La Rocha sings. "NBC is gonna flex and cast their image in you/ Disney bought the fantasies and piles of eyes/ And ABC's new thrill rides of trials and lies." Rage's revolution, however, is brought to us by Sony and televised ad nauseam by MTV. Guitarist Tom Morello did not emerge from the misty hills of Nicaragua but from Harvard University and, later, the office of Senator Alan Cranston, where he worked as a scheduler.

But at least Rage's screeds, while co-opted by the band's supposed enemies, have a bottom-up credibility. More and more, the politics of rebellion comes top down, through youth-targeted advertising. Channel One, the commercial news network for schoolkids, has launched a bafflingly vacant ad campaign that purports to display "the impact" the network has on "the way teenagers view their world." The full-page ads show the floating heads of teenagers deep in thought, as nuggets of breathtakingly shallow political pith hover above them. "I'd like to vote for Clinton," muses dark-eyed Antoneilia, 17, "but as far as I can tell he hasn't really done anything. I guess that leaves Dole." Ramon, also 17, wears thinker's glasses, as well as an earring, goatee and braids. What's Channel One got him thinking about? "Dole? You can't vote for Dole. The guy's totally stale." In another ad, one teen simply ponders the word "Recognize." The campaign plays up the look of political engagement with nary a nod to its substance. This isn't politics, it's posing.

MICHAEL CROWLEY



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**Why Dole's Senate discharge isn't enough.**

# THE LIEUTENANT

*By Matthew Cooper*

Bill Clinton got no special heads up, no warning that Bob Dole's resignation was coming. Like the rest of us, he'd believed the orchestrated leaks that started coming on Monday. In the first wave of leaks, before the rumors hit the papers, the story was that Bob Dole, eager to get on the road, would hand over daily duties to Majority Whip Trent Lott. Big deal. Then came word in Tuesday's broadcasts that he might resign the majority leader post. Bigger deal. By Wednesday morning, the Dole camp had put the word out that he was gone. Whoa! Dole has been in Congress since Clinton was 14, and Clinton was as shocked as anyone by the announcement. The president's first instincts were to ask questions. What does this mean for us? What do we do? And he understood the wave of sympathy that was coming for Dole. The Kansan's resignation was, after all, manna for pundits aching to write about a tighter race. Clinton warned his staff not to trash Dole: "It's his day." In a brief phone call, Clinton congratulated him.

Later that day, on the TV outside the Oval Office, Clinton watched the 72-year-old majority leader step forward to the microphones and the Teleprompter to proclaim: "I will seek this office with nothing to fall back on.... I leave behind the trappings of power, all comfort and all security." The teary-eyed announcement had a seismic—and predictable—effect on the Washington spin machine. So what if he had hit federal spending caps and couldn't legally travel? Finally, there was something to write about, to savor.

Will the road show save Dole? Not by itself. Consider his visit to Omaha this May. Of course, the word "Omaha" is not exactly synonymous with excitement, but that is especially true on the weekend morning I spent with Dole here. The streets and office buildings seem as empty as the surrounding plains. So when Dole's campaign sets up a rally downtown at the police station the feeling is surreal, like a crowd scene on the backlot at Universal.

Dole has come to Omaha to honor the police and pummel the president. On the podium, in the plaza outside police headquarters, Dole hits all the conservative notes in his tough-on-crime speech—liberal judges, prisoners with their "color TVs." (I think: color TVs must have been a rare luxury when conservatives first started using that shopworn line. These days, can you even *find* a black-and-white one?) Dole's talk seems forced, only the ad-libs from his prepared text sound like him. He blasts the "liberals" who want to excuse criminality by blaming society. "Of course, we want to improve society," Dole mutters, in an aside that betrays his basic humanity. Standing in front of a sea of cops he tries to echo the visual success of his rivals George Bush and Bill Clinton, who used the blue backdrop to their great advantage. But on the bleachers behind Dole is a man dressed up like McGruff, the Crime Dog, from the public service ads. (Perhaps you've seen the TV spots in which an anthropomorphic dog, wearing a trench coat, growls, "Take a bite out of crime.") It looks ridiculous.

Dole is not above stirring up the visceral animus that many still feel toward Clinton. In the Omaha crowd, I noticed that the hand-painted signs tended to look about the same, the same colors and thickness to the brushstrokes. So I asked one member of the Dole team where the signs had come from. "We had a sign-painting party and then handed them out," came the reply. And what did the signs say? "CLINTON IS A 2-TERM PRESIDENT. 1ST TERM IN THE WHITE HOUSE. THE SECOND ONE IN JAIL." "BOB DOLE. A DOER NOT A DODGER." This is rough stuff, not just condoned but coordinated by the campaign. But, then, why should we be surprised? This past winter, Dole's campaign spent over $1 million on push polls, in which voters were called with misleading information about other candidates. Very rough stuff.

So, yes, resigning from the Senate will help Dole. But it can't save him. What he's fighting isn't location but history. "It's all about leadership," Dole says. He is obsessed with the word. His recent speech on Asian policy used it, in various forms, twenty-three times. Dole's plane is called "Leader's Ship." His dog is named Leader. But, when you think about Dole's career, it's a soldier's story, not a captain's tale. More precisely, it's about a lieutenant. Webster's defines "lieutenant" as "an official empowered to act for a higher official." Dole's chapters, from the war wound to the Contract with America, form the story of a stoic lieutenant. He carried water for others. What he wants, where he'd lead—well, that is less clear even though he's become a civilian.

Every Dole profile recounts the story of how the 21-year-old 2nd Lieutenant lost the use of his arms. The



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wound has come to define Dole; it is his Rosetta stone. Nothing can or should diminish Dole's heroism. But are his injuries a credential for the presidency? In one sense, they are. They demonstrate his ability to overcome extraordinary obstacles. It's important to remember, too, that the war wound proves Dole's sense of duty, not his leadership. Bob Dole, you'll recall, didn't want to go to war. Much will be made in this election about the martial—and marital—differences between Dole and Clinton. But the central fact is that Dole was reluctant to enlist in a great and good war whereas Clinton was loath to fight in an unpopular one. Dole eventually enlisted when it became clear he was going to be drafted. His injury is a sign of his bravery. He volunteered to plunge ahead of his troops. But it was not an act of leadership so much as it was the story of a brave lieutenant.

Dole says his wounds made him more caring, more sensitive to others. But it's hard to see how the injuries have given Dole the much-vaunted empathy that he claims they have. Dole has certainly shown understanding for the handicapped, sponsoring legislation like 1990's Americans with Disabilities Act, starting his own Dole Foundation, which aids the disabled. He combs newspapers and personally calls people who've been injured. He has lifted the spirits of depressed and disabled Vietnam vets with whom Ross Perot put him in touch. But how far does Dole's empathy extend? He's helped the disabled but fought family and medical leave that would guarantee employees the right to care for a disabled loved one. He's been soft on the workplace and highway safety regulations and gun-control measures that would prevent many disabling accidents. And, on a simple rhetorical level, he lacks, say, Clinton's capacity to describe people's own lives back to them. This kind of "aerobic listening," as the author of *Primary Colors* puts it, is at once Clinton's great strength and weakness. His endless empathy means that he really does feel your pain. On the other hand, he feels everyone else's too and so is overcome with contradictory impulses. Clinton speaks to a union audience and bites his lower lip with emotion; he speaks to Texas fat cats and apologizes for raising taxes. Dole is not, to his credit, an aerobic listener. But it's frustrating that his empathy lacks elasticity.

On the way to Omaha, aboard his plane, Dole joked with reporters. Energetic and amiable, he was asked about his much-anticipated foreign tour. Where would he go? "Tahiti?" I said with a joking hopefulness. No, Dole deadpanned, "Maybe Iran and Iraq." After awhile, Dole returned to the front cabin to continue reading William Manchester's biography of Douglas MacArthur, *American Caesar*. MacArthur would seem to prove the point that wartime heroism is not a qualification for office. The hero of the Philippines became the megalomaniac of Korea. Likewise, 2nd Lieutenant Dole's valiant war record is not an entitlement for office.

After World War II, Dole's political career unfolded as the story of a loyal lieutenant serving in the command of flawed officers. He sees the buffoonery, the intrigue of those around him, but he bears it. Between 1960 and 1968 Dole was just an enlisted man, so to speak, voting against the Great Society, getting his name in the paper for taking on LBJ's crony Billy Sol Estes. He backed Goldwater but sided with the Jacob Javits-types on civil rights.

It was only under Richard Nixon that Dole became a nationally known figure. Nixon had campaigned for Dole in 1966, when the former vice president toured the country bucking up Republicans and planning his own comeback. They shared many of the same qualities: each was self-made, uncomfortable with elites, pragmatic, tough. In 1968, Dole was elected to the Senate and Nixon to the White House. The most loyal Nixon pointman on the Hill, Dole would read floor speeches drafted by the White House. When top GOP officials abandoned Nixon's controversial Supreme Court nominees Clement Haynsworth and Harrold Carswell, Dole stood by them even when the Senate minority leader, Hugh Scott, did not. Dole's obsequiousness caught the president's eye. In a December 1970 memo Nixon expressed his watchful concern for Dole to H.R. Haldeman: "[Adviser Donald] Rumsfeld has the feeling that Bob Dole may be losing some of his effectiveness because he is a knee-jerk defender of the administration. I am inclined to think that Rumsfeld may be overreacting on this point, but, of course, it is important that we not let Dole destroy his usefulness by having him step up to every fast, hard one."

Eventually Dole's usefulness paid off. He wangled a post as chairman of the Republican National Committee. At first the White House resisted Dole's appointment, feeling that a sitting senator would be too busy to fulfill the duties of a party leader. And minority leader Scott hated the upstart Dole. But Dole persuaded the White House otherwise. He used his position to blast the Democrats, attacking them for everything from being soft on crime to not paying the DNC phone bill. The White House, though, came to see Dole as too prickly. Like a soldier given a command that violated the military's rules of war, Dole balked at some of the more vulgar tasks he was assigned—protesting, for example, against the cartoons that Chuck Colson wanted placed in the RNC's magazine, showing George McGovern in Vietcong fatigues. When the White House tried to force him to step down, Dole was painfully slow in getting the hint. When he finally did, he was replaced by the ambitious U.N. ambassador George Bush. "What angered me was the callousness of a White House staff that demanded loyalty but failed to return it," Dole wrote in his 1987 memoir.

After Watergate, Dole was in the shadow of another mentor, Gerald Ford. As Ford's running mate, Dole was to be the tough veep, the liaison to the party's recently defeated Reaganite wing. The 1976 vice presidential debate in which Dole barked about "Democrat wars" is remembered as one of the great political gaffes of all time. But a more telling moment came when he was asked what he would do as vice president. This was his opportunity to offer a riff about who he was and what he



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would do. But Dole had little to say, other than some blather about reaching out to farmers. Even then, Dole's ability to articulate where he would take the country was awkward, unsure. But he soldiered on, even while the Dole campaign was treated as the poor stepchild of the Ford effort. Dole was given little money and less say.

With Ronald Reagan, too, Dole marched. When Reagan won in the fall of 1980, bringing a Senate majority with him, Dole became the chair of the Senate Finance Committee. Again, Lieutenant Dole was empowered to act for a higher official. The supply-side program was his to pass. Dole hated it, though. What he believed in was fiscal discipline, paying for what you spent. His quip about supply siders became legendary: A bus of supply siders fell off a cliff. The bad news? Three seats were empty. Dole, though, had to swallow his balanced-budget beliefs and pass the Gipper's 1981 cuts. In 1982, he would have a rejoinder to the Reaganites. He engineered the Tax Equity and Fiscal Responsibility Act. TEFRA, it was called, and the White House bought it. TEFRA was Dole's project, the clearest expression of his belief in fiscal discipline. It remains the biggest tax increase in American history, $320 billion in 1993 dollars compared to Clinton's $265 billion 1993 hike. One of the signal episodes of the Reagan era, it closed hundreds of loopholes. Dole brought discipline to Social Security a year later. Daniel Patrick Moynihan recalls how Dole's can-do spirit saved the system. When all hope had been lost, Dole went to Moynihan on the floor of the Senate, and the two agreed that this was doable, the system could be saved. Within days, Dole had brought Claude Pepper and the Reaganites together for a compromise that saved the system. "He's a man we admire and work with and love, and I don't say that lightly," Moynihan told me.

With Reagan's second term coming to a close, Dole had his moment. His run for the presidency in 1988 was, arguably, the first time he didn't have to be second in command. He offered the clearest expression of who he was. Before George Bush came up with the Noonanized phrase "kinder and gentler," Dole was offering a conservatism with a heart. He talked about "community." He showed his Jayhawk rectitude, refusing to sign New Hampshire's idiotic anti-tax pledge and vowing to a crowd in Russell that "no area of federal spending will be off limits" while pledging to be "sensitive to the needs of the left-out and the down-and-out." "He told the truth," says Moynihan. And he got trounced.

During the Bush years, Dole was a loyal trooper, helping to pass Poppy's budgets and his tax increases and his Gulf war resolutions and, more to Dole's liking, the Americans with Disabilities Act. Dole was an able legislator—the best, really—but he was still the executor of other people's dreams. When Bill Clinton took office, Dole had another chance to rule. This time, all of his commanding officers were gone. Bush and Reagan were enjoying Sunbelt retirements. "King Robert," THE NEW REPUBLIC dubbed him. And yet during Clinton's first, hapless year it's hard to think of anything that Dole offered that was *his*. Instead, Dole ably and adeptly blocked. He shot down the stimulus package and the health care bill. He wanted a deal, but he didn't know what else he wanted. "Time for Moynihan-Dole?" he asked in a note he slipped to the New York senator during one committee hearing. It never happened. Dole fudged on health care, first backing moderate plans then backing away from them with Clintonesque equivocation.

And so, when the House promulgated its Contract with America, Dole was again left playing second fiddle—this time to a Toffler-quoting, Laffer-loving man twenty years his junior. It was Newt who dominated the news; it was Gingrich who became *Time*'s Man of the Year, an accolade that meant something to Dole's generation. Everything that happened in the Senate was about Gingrich's House—the welfare plan, the balanced budget amendment, term limits. Dole ably sidled up to Gingrich, and when Gingrich rode high so, too, did Dole. Gone was Gingrich's smear of Dole, back in the TEFRA days, as "the tax collector for the welfare state." But, when the Democrats tarred Gingrich with the extremist label, they sullied Dole as well.

Now, Dole is stuck. The Lieutenant has received his honorable discharge, but he has yet to tell the demoralized troops why they should fight for him. And the best he's come up with so far is right-wing stuff. Now, he's Bush, saying anything. The man of TEFRA signed the latest anti-tax pledge, and he even talks about tax cuts. "Oh, God," says Moynihan. Oh, God, indeed. It's hard to believe Dole means it in his debt-abhorring heart. The lines that get the biggest applause at Dole rallies are delivered without conviction, too. There's Dole, huffing that he'll never let U.S. troops serve under U.N. command. That's hollow. It was Dole's Senate maneuvering that allowed Clinton to make American deployments—under U.N. command—in Somalia. And Dole knows that American troops have served ably under foreign command from Lafayette to Montgomery. Surrounded by former Jack Kemp aides campaign manager Scott Reed and communications consultant John Buckley, who once composed lines ridiculing him, Dole is a stranger in a supply-side land. Now he's even lifting Phil Gramm lines courtesy of Gary Koops, formerly of Gramm's campaign, now Dole's deputy director of communications. And yet he can't sell out all the way. He balks at big supply-side tax cuts and reaches out to old GOP hands who want in such as Ken Duberstein and Tom Korologos, fixers extraordinaire. Mari Maseng, who left Team Dole as communications director this winter, is back, too, although without title.

But the question remains now that Dole's a civilian: What's he for? The best reason to vote for Dole is that he wouldn't shirk the big ones—the budget, Medicare, welfare. He may be out of the Senate, but he could be a GOP LBJ, the majority leader turned dealmaker in chief. Dole could make the centrist deals that Clinton only talks about. One suspects that that's what he longs for, the '88 Dole willing to tell the truth, not the '96 Dole luring the rabid right with tax-cutting bait. This is the great promise not of Lieutenant, but President Dole. •



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# BOOKS & The Arts

## *Stanley Kauffmann on Films*

### Some Old Fashions

The theater career of David Belasco (1853-1931) had an effect on many who don't even know his name. His theater directing, in which he was a pioneer of realism, influenced American style and taste lastingly. His play-writing career, which in contrast was intransigently romantic, still touches us today. Never heard of him? Two of his plays were *Madame Butterfly* and *The Girl of the Golden West.*

Puccini saw *Butterfly* in London in 1900. Belasco's play (based on a story by John Luther Long) worked its way into the composer's mind as an operatic subject, and he asked his customary librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, to adapt it. Odd fact: Giacosa, who had also worked on such romances as *La Bohème* and *Tosca,* was in his own right a naturalistic dramatist and a friend of Zola's.

Another odd fact: at its premiere at La Scala on February 17, 1904, *Butterfly* was a catastrophic fiasco. Some say there was a hostile claque, some that the audience resented the exotic touches in the score, some that the cast wasn't good. Puccini revised the work just a bit, and three months later, in Brescia, it was a thundering success. Quickly it became a staple of the world repertory. In 1967 the manager of a German opera house, known for his advanced views, escorted me around his theater, across the stage on which the set for that evening's performance was already in place. It was the little house above Nagasaki to which Pinkerton would bring his Japanese bride. I looked quizzically at the avant-garde manager. He blushed, shrugged and said, "I must have a *Butterfly.*"

Now the screen has her—again—in a French-sponsored film (sung in Italian with English subtitles), directed by Frédéric Mitterrand, nephew of the late president. (Sony Classical distributes.) The opera was previously filmed in 1955, an Italian-Japanese production with a Japanese actress as Butterfly, her voice dubbed by an Italian soprano. (In 1932 Hollywood had filmed Belasco's play, without music and "modernized," with Sylvia Sidney and Cary Grant.) For his version, Mitterrand has a Chinese soprano, Ying Huang, who both acts and sings the role.

The filming is commonplace, with some fade-outs, presumably to make it more cinematic and with some inserts—Butterfly as the dancing girl she had been and might be again, along with clips of Japanese newsreels around 1904. But it remains an opera, quite conventionally filmed. The Orchestre de Paris is stirringly conducted by James Conlon of the Met. The singing is all a cut above adequate. So if you want another visit to Puccini's Japanese thermal baths, here's your chance.

But the film, as this medium often does with theater works, raises some issues about the piece. Foremost is an astonishment—that, at the turn of the century, when American expansionism and self-confidence were waxing, Belasco wrote and an audience approved this ruthless exposé of the exploitation of a 15-year-old Japanese girl by an American. A naval officer, too. On his very wedding day Pinkerton even drinks a toast with Sharpless, the American consul, to the roving American who has a girl in every port.

Structurally, the libretto is flaccid. I don't know Belasco's original, but the film reveals that Act Two, Scene One, of the opera is little more than padding, except for "*Un bel dì*" and Sharpless's visit with Pinkerton's letter. And the device by which the letter is *not* read to Butterfly is raw mechanics.

Scene Two, the finale, is a mess, dramaturgically. Pinkerton arrives after a three-year absence and doesn't disturb the sleeping Butterfly—so that the plot can clank along and he can return after the suicide. We are also asked to believe that he has persuaded his American wife to come along on this visit to this previous wife, who still thinks she is married to him, and to ask for the child of that marriage. Some persuader, that Pinkerton. He must also have persuaded the U.S. Navy to allow Kate to accompany him on the *Abraham Lincoln*; how else would she have arrived in Nagasaki with him?

Well, anyway, there are the *tira mi su* melodies. Also, before we sniff too haughtily, we might remember that James Joyce loved Puccini and, in one of his letters, addressed Nora as "My dear little Butterfly."

Jim Jarmusch's early films, *Stranger Than Paradise, Down by Law* and *Mystery Train,*

### FILMS WORTH SEEING

**Cold Comfort Farm.** *Stella Gibbons's comic novel of 1932—about a Bright Young Thing from London amid a woolly farm family—engagingly done. Accomplished acting by Kate Beckinsale, Eileen Atkins, Ian McKellen and others. (Reviewed 5/27/96)* **Flirting with Disaster.** *Light and laughable. A bizarre, sexy comedy about a young man's search for his biological parents, breezily written and directed by David O. Russell. (4/22/96)* **I Shot Andy Warhol.** *Mary Harron, who is English, authentically recreates the New York Underground of the '60s, with the clever but demented Valerie Solanas at the center. (5/6/96)* **Last Dance.** *Could be called "Dead Woman Walking," with Sharon Stone (excellent) as the Southerner on death row and Rob Morrow (puny) as her champion. The script doesn't finally satisfy, but Bruce Beresford directs it masterfully. (5/20/96)*—**SK**



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were laconic and oblique—attempts to stretch concepts of drama and to be witty in those attempts. *Night on Earth* was a moderately clever episodic film that took place in taxis around the world. All these pictures had at least some claim to stylistic progress.

Now he has retrogressed. **Dead Man** (Miramax) is a reversion to a mode that became passé about twenty years ago. It's situated visually and structurally right in the center of the New German Cinema of the 1970s, the era of Kluge and Straub and (the dimmer works of) Fassbinder. As if to underscore his retrogression, Jarmusch chose to do this film in black and white. (His cinematographer, once again, is Robby Müller, who was at the center of that German movement.)

The key idea in those German films and in Jarmusch's latest is a sort of negativism, the rejection of conventional expectations—in narrative suspense, logical progress, character credibility—to cosset an audience that had already arrived at postmodernism through the easiest avenues of access. The overall effect of many of those films—I mean this only figuratively—is of filming while drugged. The filmmaker thinks he is moving purposefully, but the consonance of the film is all within his head; and is accepted as consonance in the heads of viewers eager to share the druggedness.

*Dead Man* is equipped to entice us into its affectless world because so many prominent people are in it: Johnny Depp, Robert Mitchum, John Hurt, Alfred Molina, Gabriel Byrne. Depp has already shown a penchant for eccentric films: this one is only more so. The rest of them possibly wanted to be in it as a change from the usual—and of course because they liked Jarmusch's past work. Depp excepted, they have little to do.

It's the Old West in the 1870s. Depp is an accountant named William Blake (yep) from Cleveland who goes out there for a job in a plant run by Hurt and owned by Mitchum. The job doesn't materialize, and this city-bred type runs into a series of adventures, which leak into one another and which could just as easily be another series of adventures so long as they were unexplained, pointless and portentous. In the course of his escapades he meets an Indian who thinks he is *the* William Blake reincarnated, and the unlikelihood of this mistake is the funniest thing in the picture. It all ends elegiacally but emptily.

Come back, Jim Jarmusch. Come back to the pungency of your first films. Leave the 1970s. Come back to the future. •

# *Edmund's Castle*

**BY PAUL BERMAN**

**From the Uncollected Edmund Wilson**
**Selected and introduced by**
**Janet Groth and David Castronovo**
**(Ohio University Press, 372 pp., $32.95)**

**Edmund Wilson: A Biography**
**by Jeffrey Meyers**
**(Houghton Mifflin, 554 pp., $35)**

I.

Edmund Wilson typically began his essays and reviews on a note of almost excruciating flatness, sometimes merely with the unadorned announcement that a book by so-and-so has been published by such-and-such a publisher. Or not even that much. One of the essays in *From the Uncollected Edmund Wilson*, a *New Yorker* piece from 1950, begins with the curtest opening line probably ever to run in a glossy American magazine: "*The Classical Tradition* (Oxford), is by a Columbia professor"—and not another word.

It was as if Wilson had never learned that every review and article, no matter how humble, ought to begin breathlessly, and every "lead" contain a "hook," and a gruesome cadaver ought to be produced by at least the second sentence, and never should the reader be allowed to stray from his chair. Normally Wilson took only a small interest in the formal structures of literature, though he was certainly competent to discuss them, notably the structures of poetry in Greek, Latin, medieval Italian, French and Russian (this latter violently contested by Vladimir Nabokov); but in the structure of that humblest of genres, the well-made magazine essay, at which he toiled all his life, he took no interest whatsoever; anyway not enough to analyze the topic in depth.

Yet those anti-glamorous beginnings of his did follow a well-made structure. The flat beginnings made a runway, and after a few lines Wilson's essays would start to lift off, the great critic would go pour himself another drink, and away he soared, into the heavens of lyric emotion or crystalline lucidity. A nice example appears in the *Uncollected* collection—a review of a book by Alfred North Whitehead, which originally ran in THE NEW REPUBLIC in 1926. Wilson begins, "Doctor Whitehead, in his *Science and the Modern World*, has suggested that the romantic movement of the early nineteenth century was, not merely a literary phenomenon, but really a philosophical reaction against the ideas of contemporary science." The start is clunky, due to the "merely" and "really," which are logically mismatched and, at the same time, make an irritating near-rhyme.

But he has already set out a stimulating idea. Then he proceeds, in the course of no more than eight paragraphs, to launch an argument about the history of Western literature, with Whitehead as inspiration. He says that the neo-classical writers such as Pope and Racine drew on Newton and other scientists of their time more than on the classical writers of Ancient Greece and Rome. The neo-classicists were reasonable and regular, but the orderly, scientific universe that they evoked in their writings was also, after a while, unbearable. So the unbearableness gave rise to a romantic reaction, which brought the inexplicable and the unscientific back into literature.

Romanticism, too, became unbearable and in the later nineteenth century gave rise to naturalists such as Flaubert, whose fidelity to the observable world marked a return to the neo-classical spirit of science. Then the entire cycle repeated, and the naturalists gave rise to yet another romantic reaction in the form of the French Symbolists such as Valéry and Proust (whom Wilson counted as a Symbolist) and their English-language peers, Yeats, Joyce and Eliot—all of whom wrote about the internal and the imaginary

PAUL BERMAN's book *A Tale of Two Utopias: The Political Journey of the Generation of 1968* has just been published by W.W. Norton.



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and no longer worried about constructing a scientifically precise literary duplicate of the visible world.

But Wilson would like to see this cycle brought to an end. He makes his point by comparing the "moderns" of the last few centuries, forever caught between their twin poles of neo-classicism and romanticism, with the original classics of Greece and Rome:

> It seems to be the special curse of the modern mind that it is obliged to vibrate between these two poles without ever coming to rest between them. It is perhaps their artistic equilibrium which we really envy in the classics; that is perhaps really the thing which they have that we never seem to be able to achieve. Regularity and logic in Sophocles do not exclude either tenderness or violence; and, in Virgil, the sort of thing that Flaubert can do, the exact objective reproduction of things does not exclude the sort of thing that Wordsworth and Shelley can do, the mysterious, the fluid, the pathetic, and the vague.

And the man is soaring (if you can forgive him his repeated "its," "reallys" and "perhapses").

The review offers a foretaste of *Axel's Castle* (1931), Wilson's first important book, which taught Americans how to read the Symbolists and modernists. Only the foretaste from 1926 was, in one small respect, superior to the taste itself. By the time that Wilson had worked his way to the final chapters of *Axel's Castle* ("Asshole's Cactus," he called it in his letters), the Great Depression had descended upon him, and his plunge into Marxism had begun, and he was addled by the excitement; and in the last pages of his book, when he expressed frustration at the Symbolist and modernist writers—they made him feel claustrophobic, the cult of the imaginary drove him to despair—he came up with the idea of mixing in a bit of Marxist agitation, Soviet style.

Nothing like that appears in the 1926 review. There he isn't trying to change the political world. He is looking for an "artistic equilibrium." He has no objection to the atmosphere of sleep and dreams that you find in Proust and the Symbolist poets. But he prizes his wakefulness, too. He wants to be wild and, at the same time, controlled; to be focused inward, and outward; to be regular and logical, and nonetheless tender and violent; to be exact, and mysterious; predictable, and unpredictable—to be cut off from nothing, to be emotionally and intellectually complete.

So his description of an "artistic equilibrium" is a bit of a manifesto for a grander style of imagination. The collectors of the *Uncollected*, Janet Groth and David Castronovo, remind us in their introduction that Wilson tried all his life to impose an intellectual order on emotional chaos. But that was only half of his purpose—the dominant half, I'm sure, certainly the half that he most enjoyed discussing in later years, when his interest in literary experimentation seemed to decline. In that 1926 manifesto he also wanted to shake up order with a bit of chaos. The cool rationalist was also a friend of the crazy avant-garde. Both, not one. That is why it is still worth reading Wilson as a critic, not just as a literary historian or chronicler. He has something to teach us about how to think and feel—and he can do it in eight paragraphs beginning with a flat and unassuming lead.

## II.

Wilson's career was shaped by one large early passion and one large dismal event. As he tells us in *The Bit Between My Teeth*, the large early passion was already upon him by 1910, at age 15. He grew up in New Jersey and discovered in his father's library the works of Hippolyte Taine, and threw himself so deeply into reading that at one point, when he was in New York, he went walking through the streets buried in the pages of the French critic. My interest in Wilson has led me to rummage around for Taine, and I have turned up his *Essais de critique et d'histoire* from 1866 and a few other things; and the attraction is obvious.

Taine was, I suppose, the first important modern writer to propose a relation between science and literature, anyway the first to work up an elaborate method for scientifically interpreting literature. In his view, man was gradually becoming the scientific master of the natural world, and was bound to become the master of the "moral sciences," too, and as a result of those progressive steps was certain to become ever more free and prosperous in the future. And the way to promote those admirable advances was to write critical essays that identify the racial and historical and even the geographical roots that produce a given writer's work. Botany and zoology were Taine's model. His theory was positivist (to use the proper term) and a bit hokey, though I'm sure it didn't seem that way in 1910.

But this theory does lend force to Taine's criticism. His sentences are a forward-rushing ocean wave. You turn the page, and the sentences build still more, and you are swept away by the happy belief that literature's story is as thrilling


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and as important as any of the stories that literature tells; and by the equally happy belief that science can shed light on literature's achievement. Or, if you don't exactly believe those ideas, you are swept away by Taine's colors and images and personal charm. For science was art, in Taine's hands. Impersonality was his personality. And once you have read a little of this, it becomes obvious that whole pieces of Taine's grand intellectual program—the tone and some of the details, together with an artist's admirable willingness to dispense with programs altogether—seeped into Wilson's imagination at a very early age, and never entirely seeped out again.

The boy who read French criticism in the street wrote high-school and college essays on literature—a number of them appear in the *Uncollected* volume—that are freakishly self-confident and assured. He wrote as if he had already read the entire history of literature, which can't have been possible—but must have been. The teenage Wilson already commanded the tone of a master who, like Taine, stands inside literature and outside of it at the same time, responding with full emotion while somehow remaining perfectly calm and objective. He was a little monster of the library. It is only from the judgments in those student essays that you can tell how young the author is.

The most amusing of them, the piece on Stendhal, which ran in the Hill School magazine, calls for less cynicism than we find in Stendhal—for a few more golden threads and fleecy clouds (and it is characteristic of Wilson that, in *Axel's Castle* many years later, he stuck to those same teenage prejudices against Stendhal, even though the Stendhalian Taine would never have approved). Having read a world of books did not make young Edmund worldly. And then the author of that apple-cheeked essay against cynicism, having already shaped his personality around a passion for Hippolyte Taine and the history of literature and an attraction to the idea of science and progress, went off to take part in the large dismal event that was the First World War.

EDMUND WILSON BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

We don't know in much detail what Wilson did and saw during his time in the service. He wrote about the war in a number of stories and poems and other scattered jottings that he published in *A Prelude* and elsewhere, but the descriptions are limited, and so far none of his biographers has done the necessary research to add much depth. Still, it's obvious what must have happened to him. The naïf from Princeton toiled in America's medical corps in France. He was a stretcherbearer. He nursed the wounded from the Battle of Chateau-Thierry, behind the lines. One of the poems from his *Poets, Farewell!* (1929) begins:

> When all the young were dying, I dwelt
> among the dead—
> Many I lifted from the homeless bed
> And laid in that low chamber side by side...

He knew corpses by the heap before he had ever had a lover. His experience must have been like that of his fellow sufferers in the overseas medical corps, Hemingway and Dos Passos. So young Edmund came back to America, and he was in a state of perfect agony. For him, civilization had already collapsed. He could no longer take seriously the idea of pursuing any kind of ordinary career. The values of conventional American society, the demands of suburban respectability, the goal of making a reasonable living—all had turned to ash. His Greenwich Village life in the 1920s, working for magazines and drifting from apartment to apartment and drinking with the special bravado of the era, as if liquor were rebellion in the marijuana mode of a later age, drew on a real fury.

He felt that society's fundamental principles, being hugely in error, could hardly be expected to survive for long. And these sentiments, harder and angrier than you might suppose, beamed a light on every new book that came his way. You can see why he was thrilled by the modernist writers he discusses in *Axel's Castle*, by the newness and the radicalism of their efforts; and you can see why an imaginary or interior universe, or the life of Greenwich Village for that matter, would, at the same time, dismay him. You can see why he responded so enthusiastically to Hemingway and Fitzgerald, with their coolly recounted tales of wounded heroes wandering through moral moonscapes. He himself was a character from out of those novels: a bruised young man on the verge of a crackup, wearing disillusionment on his sleeve. And you can see why he responded with still more excitement to Dos Passos, who made him impatient sometimes but managed even so to influence a good half of what he produced between the 1920s and the 1940s.

Dos Passos's achievement was to write about the whole of society, to describe the conflict of social classes and the workings of economics and sociology, more or less as did the science-minded naturalist writers of the past—while making use of the stream-of-consciousness monologues and the attention to popular culture and the collage style of the modernist avant-garde. The reconciling of literary opposites that Wilson had called for in his 1926 review of Whitehead and in *Axel's Castle* was already underway in Dos Passos's novels. You



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might say that Wilson's criticism was Dos Passos, theorized. And in that same spirit, Wilson wrote journalism, too, that was Dos Passos, applied.

The jumbled techniques of Wilson's two volumes of social reporting from the 1930s, *The American Jitters* and *Travels in Two Democracies*—now hard fact-reporting, now overtly fictional, now dramatic dialogue, now a waterfall of visual details—look shapeless or random only if you fail to keep in mind Dos Passos's *U.S.A.* Still more of Dos Passos's influence pops up in Wilson's fiction—even if Wilson was never able to achieve Dos Passos's pastel lightness. And apart from those technical influences, beginning in the late 1920s (with a special zeal after Black Friday, 1929), Wilson followed Dos Passos yet again in looking leftward for political and literary alternatives—though it's true that Wilson's leftward and Dos Passos's were not exactly the same.

Dos Passos's political imagination was a nostalgia for the Wobblies and the immigrant anarchists—a labor libertarianism from the 1910s, conceived more as an aesthetic protest against capitalism (and, soon enough, against communism) than as any sort of practical program. But Wilson was anti-nostalgic. His radicalism celebrated the modern, which meant, during the first terrible years of the Depression, that he leaned toward the communists. He composed manifestos filled with ominous phrases about a dictatorship of the class-conscious workers. He hosted a book party for the Communist leader William Z. Foster, the author of *Toward Soviet America* (with its famous promise to "liquidate" not only the Democrats and Republicans but the Socialists, Elks, Odd Fellows, Masons, Rotarians, YMCA, Knights of Columbus and just about everybody else).

Wilson had a high opinion of Comrade Foster—"an American worker with a grievance," in his unfortunate description. His career had reached a decidedly ridiculous stage. Yet once he had collected his wits and pulled away from the American Communists, he set out, in the scholarly spirit that animated almost everything he did, to master the main ideas and authors of the Marxist tradition and to present them, in *To the Finland Station*, to American readers, just as he had done with the modernists in *Axel's Castle*. And he set out to propose a few useful Marxist emendations of his own—to work up something original, his own idea, as Dos Passos kept urging him to do.

This phase of Wilson's work brought him back to Taine's goal of uniting the sciences, moral and physical, only now in a more political version. The Marxism of Karl Marx came out of a German philosophical tradition; but the Marxism of Edmund Wilson, as he presented it, came out of the French Revolution and the French writers of the nineteenth century. Wilson devoted a chapter of *To the Finland Station* to Taine, and his tone was deprecating, mostly on the ground that Taine belonged to the failed bourgeois tradition that would now have to give way before Marx and Engels and the modern socialists.

Yet Wilson's theme in *To the Finland Station* was exactly the one that Taine had announced in the introduction to *Essais de critique et d'histoire*: the theme of man discovering the laws of history in a scientific spirit, and using those laws to foresee and in some degree modify the events of history. Even some of Wilson's phrasing echoes Taine, ever so lightly. And having attributed to Marxism a background in French positivism, Wilson went on to describe Marxism itself in terms that could be reconciled with a distinctly American spirit of science.

The true American Marxism—the Marxism that bears an indigenous stamp and which was not just imported from Europe—was always marked by the effort to combine Karl Marx with John Dewey: to make a liberal Marxism, so to speak, in which the orthodox Marxist idea of "scientific socialism" would be rendered modest and self-questioning, therefore scientific for real, instead of Hegelian and grandiose. In the 1910s a couple of Dewey's admirers in the Socialist Party of America tried to work up a Marx-and-pragmatism fusion of that sort, and in the 1920s and '30s the effort was continued by two of Dewey's brainy students at Columbia, Sidney Hook (in a sophisticated version) and Max Eastman (in a cheerier but not so sophisticated version).

Wilson was drawn more to Eastman, which was natural, I suppose, because Eastman was older than Wilson, and a literary man to boot. Eastman had edited *The Masses* in the 1910s and later *The Liberator* (which had published one of Wilson's first professional writings), and he churned out a not-quite-excellent poetry that Wilson rather liked, maybe because the not-quite-excellence resembled his own poetry. Eastman's idea of how to improve Marxism was to draw a line between Marxist dialectics, which he regarded as hopelessly mystical, and Marxist science or "social engineering," which he regarded as political wisdom. Marx the mystical Hegelian was much to be regretted; but Lenin the scientific revolutionary was to be applauded, except when he clung to Marx's mysticism. And this very peculiar theory of Eastman's, a pragmatist Leninism, became for Wilson the core of everything that seemed to him valid in the Marxist idea.

Taine and Eastman, taken together, gave Wilson a wonderful literary structure for *Finland Station*. The story that he tells—the faltering early efforts by the French historian Michelet and other writers to imagine historical forces that are driven by man and not by the gods; the gigantic step taken by Marx to understand those forces on a deeper level; then a still-larger step by Lenin, who applied historical science to the practical task of building a more moral society, though with mystical elements still clinging to the grand project and in some degree ruining it—has the form of a Victorian novel, rich with braided plots and amazing characters, each of them struggling against his own weaknesses and flaws, each achieving something grand, with ambiguous consequences.

I don't think there has ever been a more exhilarating account of what it is to study or to read. *Finland Station*'s opening scene of Michelet stumbling on the name of the Italian philosopher Vico in a book, and in that manner discovering a few first elements of what would become the socialist idea of history; the image of Marx and Engels many years later, studying together in the Manchester library and gazing out the colored windowpanes


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as if at the light of human intellect; the electric energy that Wilson ascribes to Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* ("Nowhere perhaps in the history of thought is the reader so made to feel the excitement of a new intellectual discovery")—these images of studying and writing become, in Wilson's hands, breathtaking to read. He describes the young student Vladimir I. Ulyanov—the future Lenin—coming across the hard-to-find writings of Marx in a provincial Russian town. We gasp. The portrait of Marx himself—the genius, slightly mad, deeply honorable, scarily cruel, flecked with a prophetic rage from out of the Hebrew Bible, the angriest intellectual in all of history—must be the most vivid thing Wilson ever wrote.

But it is also true that Wilson's take on scientific Marxism led to many passages in *Finland Station* and other writings that have come to seem no more reasonable than his early enthusiasm for William Z. Foster. Wilson spent a few months in the Soviet Union in 1935, in the period just before the Moscow purge trials, and the impression he came away with was sufficiently deluded that, when he published his parallel portraits of Depression America and Soviet Communism in 1936, he could still title them *Travels in Two Democracies*. He should have listened to Dos Passos on Soviet matters. You have only to read Dos Passos's collected letters side by side with Wilson's to see how much foolishness on the Marxist left in the 1930s could have been avoided with a little respectful attention to the old-fashioned Wobblies and anarchists.

Oddest of all was Wilson's impression of Lenin. He pictured Lenin as someone like himself—the product of an austere Russian intelligentsia that could be compared to the old New Englanders from the age of puritan virtue. He visited Lenin's childhood home and could nearly smell the comforting clean air of Concord, Massachusetts, and this delusion led, in the final moments of *Travels in Two Democracies*, to the single weirdest passage in the whole of Wilson's writings, all thirty-odd volumes of it (or forty-odd, depending on how you count). He tours Lenin's tomb in Moscow. The embalmed corpse stares up at him. Wilson is enraptured.

> It is a beautiful face, of exquisite fineness; and—what surely proves sufficiently its authenticity—it is profoundly aristocratic. Yet it is an aristocrat who is not specialized as an aristocrat, a poet who is not specialized as a poet, a scientist who is not specialized as a scientist.... For here humanity has produced, independent of all the old disciplines, the scientist whose study is humanity, the poet whose material is not images but the water and salt of human beings—the superior man....

This was not a small element in Wilson's thinking. It came out of Eastman's idea of Marxism. Eastman himself compared Lenin to Dewey. Not to be outdone, Wilson compared Trotsky's writings on Lenin to Plato's writings on Socrates, and in one of the essays of *The Triple Thinkers* (1938) he compared Lenin to Dante. This was madness! Yet the impression that Wilson's cult of the poet-scientist Lenin makes on us today—the impression that Wilson's enthusiasm for Soviet Communism was unbounded, and his reservations timidly circumspect—is not really correct.

The distinction drawn by Eastman between the regrettable mysticism of Karl Marx and the admirable scientific social engineering of V.I. Lenin had many oddities, but it did open a vein of criticism on the Communist idea. In the early 1920s Eastman spent almost two years in Russia, which afterward made him the single greatest expert on Soviet Communism among the American intellectuals (apart from the Menshevik exiles at *The New Leader*). And though Eastman clung to his original feeling about Lenin, the years wore on, and he became increasingly aware that, under Stalin, Communism was turning out less than well. It was Eastman who brought some of Trotsky's early condemnations of Stalin to the attention of the English-speaking world (Eastman was the translator of Trotsky's masterpiece, *The History of the Russian Revolution*). By the early '30s, Stalin had no greater enemy in the United States, at least not among the intellectuals.

Eastman published a book in 1934 called *Artists in Uniform*, about totalitarianism in the Soviet arts and among the Soviet Union's foreign defenders, which sold less than 500 copies and caused the American Communists and their fellow travelers to cover him with odium and cross the street rather than endure the horror of having to say hello. Stalin himself called Eastman a "gangster of the pen." Yet that book of Eastman's, written as it was in the name of a truer, more scientific Leninism, represented the starting point of what would eventually become, many years later, the campaign by American intellectuals to defend the intellectuals and artists of the Soviet bloc. Eastman was the pioneer. And to anyone who followed the ins and outs of doctrinal debate on the American left, Wilson's embrace of Eastman's theoretical position was plainly meant to embrace some of his political criticisms, too—even if Wilson was less of a crusader than Eastman.

From a philosophical point of view, the difficulty with Eastman's brand of Marxism was this: it was all too easy to show that Lenin was not, in fact, a sober-minded social engineer motivated by the best of intentions—and then what was the Eastmanian Marxist to do? The version of pragmatist Marxism that Sidney Hook had invented was a lot more flexible, therefore sturdier. The Moscow Trials took place; Stalin's Leninist rivals in the Soviet Union bowed their heads in submission and defeat; the unsubmissive Trotsky, in his Mexican exile, thundered dogmatism with every breath; and Hook had no great difficulty in retreating from a revolutionary Leninism that had turned irrational to a social democratic anti-communism, arguing quite reasonably all the while that Karl Marx would have done the same. (On the matter of communism, Hook's social democrats, like Dos Passos's anarchists and Wobblies, had been right all along.) But Eastman's doctrine was Bolshevik or nothing, which meant that, with each new disturbing bit of news from the Soviet Union, the doctrine looked ever sillier, until, by 1940, Eastman himself came to recognize that Leninist revolution, considered as a scientific hypothesis, had been experimentally falsified. And off he went, hi-ho, leading the charge for an alternative hypothesis based on free-market cold war zealotry and *Reader's Digest*.

The evolutionary stages in Wilson's Marxism are a little harder to see, mostly because *Finland Station* took so long to write. Wilson had to take up German and Russian, study the arcane writings of difficult authors, produce a first draft in the form of book reviews for THE NEW REPUBLIC, then work up the reviews into proper chapters, with the effect that, though he had begun his labors during the administration of Herbert Hoover, he managed to complete the book ("liquidate" it, in his now-rueful term) only in 1940, when the world had turned upside down. And so *Finland Station* has the very great peculiarity of reflecting, in one passage or another, each phase of Wilson's passage through Marxism: revolutionary fervor; less-than-revolutionary fervor; certainty; doubt; radical engagement; scholarly disengagement.

Is *Finland Station* Wilson's finest book? It would make more sense to reserve that honor for *The Shores of Light*, the best of his omnibus essay collections. But, yes, considered as a single piece of writing, *Finland Station* is certainly the strongest of his works. Even now it remains the



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greatest study of Marxism ever written in the United States, from a literary point of view. (Hook's volumes are superior in their discussion of philosophical issues, and some recent authors have given us a more accurate historical account.)

Wilson's Marxist passion led to some other achievements, too. The essay on Dickens in *The Wound and the Bow*—usually considered a book of Freudian literary studies, due to the title essay, but Marxist just as much—shows us Wilson at his best, gliding serenely from the biographical to the larger historical background to the work at hand. Whole sections of the 1930s journalism, looked at today, remind us that Wilson was a pretty good labor reporter. But Marxism also led him to some very ghastly stuff, not just in the panicky post-Black Friday years when he was impressed by William Z. Foster. There was the essay in *The Triple Thinkers* on Flaubert's politics, where Flaubert disappears into a black hole of Marxist political categories; and another essay in that book on Marxism and literary criticism, where the Marxist categories themselves disappear in a factory atmosphere of mechanical exposition and numbered paragraphs.

The Marx-and-science adventure as a whole cannot be said to have been, for Wilson, fully a success. The second thoughts that you keep stumbling on in *Finland Station*, the shifts in tone from Marxist advocacy to cool observation, show that he knew it, too. The early 1940s were hard on almost everyone from his generation. Fitzgerald and a couple of Wilson's other literary friends died. Hemingway and Dos Passos somehow lost a large part of their talent. Everything that had come out of the First World War, the bitterness combined with the feeling that something new and excellent might possibly be born, if only the writers would show enough zeal for the modern and the inventive—all of that was exhausted.

In his diaries of *The Forties*, Wilson himself remarked on "the tendency of the writers of my generation to burn themselves out or break down." And he was merely one among the others, or nearly so. By the time that *Finland Station* came out, he was 45 years old and he had to recognize that Marxism no longer meant anything to him, and the dream of unity between science and literature had led to a hopeless muddle, and he had nothing new to teach his friends and readers. It must have been a terrible moment. He didn't die, or even suffer a breakdown—though it's striking that *The Forties* are much thinner than his diaries of other decades. He didn't lose his talent, either—though he never did write another book as solidly constructed as *Finland Station*. But the thread of study and imagination that had led him from Taine and the First World War to modernism and Dos Passos and Marx was broken, and he had to start over.

### III.

It can be easy to imagine that Wilson's later work followed the random pattern of a freelancer's assignments. But if you look carefully you will see that a good part of what he wrote during the second half of his career was plainly meant to address the disaster that had overtaken the first half, and to address it in a fairly orderly way, too, even if he never sat down to produce a programmatic statement of his new idea.

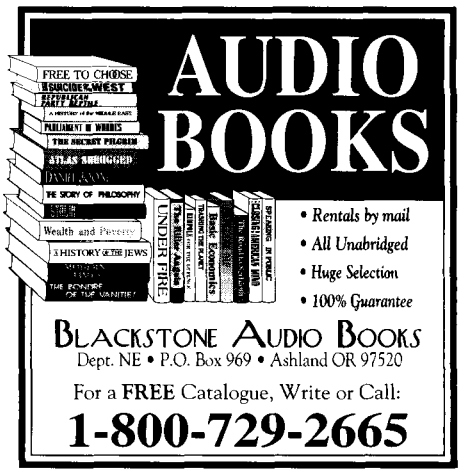
This new idea had four main tenets. The original sentiments that he had taken home from the First World War never did go away. Sometimes they grew more severe, like his gout. But capitalism no longer seemed to him the root cause of every dreadfulness in modern life. Instead he worried about the soulless machine quality of bureaucracies and of huge institutions in general, capitalist and communist alike. Second, he no longer felt any faith in human progress or theories of history or grand-scale applications of science—felt, in fact, that theories of progress and history and science were to be distrusted.

Third, he did still want to find possible alternatives for society, only the alternatives that now appealed to him were archaic and idiosyncratic leftovers from a distant past, before the age of soulless bureaucracies and the triumph of commercialism—the vestiges of the American Indian societies with their animosity to private property, for instance. Or the Jews and their culture, ancient and (to a lesser degree) modern. Or the French Canadians. Or his own region of upstate New York, which he took pleasure in picturing as a last isolated pocket of precapitalist America (with its nineteenth-century Oneida utopian socialist community still alive, in the form of the Community Plate industry, left over from the era before people had given up on imaginative social experiments). The anti-nostalgic modernist became a connoisseur of the antique. And, fourth, instead of looking for a political movement or a literary new wave to lead the way, Wilson took on the ornery air of a curmudgeon, intending to communicate the idea of non-conformity and individual resistance with the example of his own personal bristliness. Instead of the vanguard party, the rearguard personality.

This last of his post-1940 inspirations, the curmudgeon style, was not his happiest stroke. He liked to get a rise out of people by adopting preposterous positions—by arguing, say, in favor of eugenics in *Europe Without Baedeker*, his journalism about Europe after the Second World War (in which he also made clear that, in his isolationist estimation, America's plunge into the Second World War had been a mistake). "If we can produce, from some cousin of the jackal or the wolf, the dachshund and the Great Dane, the Pekinese and the poodle, what should we not be able to do with man?" But this sort of thing requires a more tolerant fondness for Wilson than readers may sometimes feel. By the time he was thinking up book titles like *A Piece of My Mind* (1956), it should have been obvious that the crankiness had gotten out of hand. The complaint that he made against Eliot in *Axel's Castle*—that Eliot was archly pretending to a premature fogeydom—applied to himself as young as 50. But the worst was when he jumbled together the mischievous and the serious, and left it impossible to tell the one from the other.

The little mishap that overtook him in regard to his taxes—he forgot to pay them between 1946 and 1955—led to the kind of negotiation with the Internal Revenue Service that prompted his first lawyer to advise him to flee the country and take citizenship somewhere else, and his next lawyer to advise him to go on welfare to inspire the IRS's pity; and with lawyers like that, Wilson's mishap eventually required nothing less than White House intervention, via Arthur Schlesinger Jr. during the Kennedy administration, to prevent the settlement from being any more onerous than it was. The book that Wilson wrote about this affair, *The Cold War and the Income Tax*, jumbled the serious and the ornery so badly that, for a good many readers, only the ornery survives.

Still, *The Cold War and the Income Tax*





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was a reasonably straightforward work of political criticism. The mindlessness of the modern bureaucratic state, the danger of uncontrolled power, the imperatives of a war machine and the ghastliness of modern combat, which Wilson remembered all too well from his corpse-stacking days in the First World War: those were his themes, along with a highly useful and patriotic aside about the need for what has become the Library of America. The book was a protest against power and the cold war, an anti-war tract in the spirit of the radical 1950s and early '60s. It had something in common with *The Root Is Man* by Dwight Macdonald, who had likewise spent the late 1930s as an anti-Stalinist Marxist, until 1940, when he, too, had been forced to adjust. And it owed a good deal to *Liberation*, the pacifist magazine edited by the Reverend A.J. Muste, who had gone through his own period of revolutionary Marxism in the '30s (and was much admired by Wilson at the time), before moving on to a radical Christian nonviolence.

In the world of the American left during the '50s and '60s, *Liberation* was quite an important magazine. The message of left-wing Christian nonviolence fell on eager ears in the civil rights movement. In the later '60s, under Muste's heir, Dave Dellinger, the magazine became a principal journal of the anti-Vietnam War movement and the New Left. Wilson was full of enthusiasm for *Liberation*. He not only allowed it to publish a portion of his *Cold War and the Income Tax* but signed away the book's copyright to the magazine, just to underline his commitment. But because he had, after all, failed to pay his taxes (except for local taxes—he didn't want to lose his two houses!—as is pointed out by Jeffrey Meyers, the most recent biographer), the seriousness of his political commitment was hard to judge. "Lucidity, force, and ease" were Wilson's gods, and force and ease never left him; but lucidity and crankiness were sometimes at odds.

The same cranky problem cropped up in the famously wrongheaded introduction to his enormous study of the literature of the American Civil War, *Patriotic Gore*, in 1962. The introduction was a scandal even before it appeared, due to his comparison of warring nations to sea slugs, gobbling one another up out of primordial instinct at the bottom of the ocean—a Taine-like zoological touch—and his refusal to distinguish between a Lincoln on one hand and a Bismarck or a Lenin on the other. (By the 1960s Lenin and not just Stalin loomed as a bad guy in Wilson's eyes.) Lincoln's victory over the South and the Soviet Union's invasion of Hungary in 1956 seemed to Wilson pretty much the same. But how seriously did Wilson mean any of that? It's easy to look at the sea-slugs and the crackerbarrel style and to conclude: not very.

Yet in those introductory pages Wilson was laying out the principles of everything that follows in *Patriotic Gore*. For it is obvious enough, if you look back on it today, that *Patriotic Gore* was, in one large respect, a companion volume to *The Cold War and the Income Tax*. His portraits of writers who participated in some way in the Civil War are wonderfully vivid, and you can read through them the way you read a short story collection, without looking for any sort of larger message or moral, marveling at the details and the writer's discipline and imagination. But if you take the portraits together and grant to Wilson the unity that he himself attributed to his own book, *Patriotic Gore* stands as an elaborate expression of pacifist anti-statism and anti-centralism.

Looked at that way, his book on the civil war was a philosophical response to the Marxism and science-worship of his earlier years. It was *Finland Station*, upside down. Wilson wanted to argue that man was not, in fact, learning to master his destiny, and that to believe such a

## *The Prodigal Son, Accompanied by the Ideogram*

for *instead*, attends the performance of a Cantonese opera. If there is no such symbol, he carves one in his arm. If the knife is blunt or the skin unyielding, he goes alone. If there is no opera, he sings to himself though the song of the goldfinch nesting in his one good lung is only a melodious cough. In the opera, a magician makes a fist and covers it with a scarf he has been waving very slowly. He lifts the scarf and produces a hypothesis. The vanished fist, still attached—hypothetically—to the magician's arm, will only return to the song of a goldfinch. The director insists on using a real bird. It dies just before making its entrance. The magician, oblivious to this, waves the scarf again. His disembodied fist materializes, clutching some feathers, in a bird cage carried by a peasant in another opera.

## *The Prodigal Son Paces the Other Half of a Semicircle*

He has been breathing mercenary weather. Much is discussed, plans and contracts are drawn up, marble slabs ordered from another continent. When the project is abandoned, only a spiral staircase has been erected. Something always intervenes. A centipede with multiple fractures drags the useless legs and makes its way along the banister, proving that there is no excess in the insect world. The absence of landscape is always demanding, like arpeggios when the fingers are cold and the joints swollen. It is not rising to the occasion that troubles him; it is the occasion itself, the irrefutable fact of it, how moments seldom conform to place. Dusk is heavy on his shoulders and he pauses to contemplate the burden.

## *The Prodigal Son In His Own Words: Fate*

Sir Isaac Newton has not considered the overripe asteroid, a prime factor (so one theory goes) in precipitating the extinction of the dinosaur. The likelihood of being hit by one of these dwarf planets today is as remote as the odds of ending up in the fist of a tornado. There ought to be some indemnity for phenomena of this magnitude. One could make a killing just amending life insurance policies in Kansas. Call it the Newton Clause, the Dorothy Principle, the dark variable in the plummeting $x$ or $y$. We leave apple season as we might leave a party we've crashed—with an exaggerated nonchalance that gives us away before we're out the door and headed for another overwhelming disappointment. A blunt and discriminating stillness in the wind prompts us to move to Kansas and up the ante. We demand to know if our contingency plans consider the possibility that the interstellar debris for which we're still preparing may have fallen while we were minding our earthly business.

**Dionisio D. Martínez**



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thing was to invite every kind of calamity. In *Finland Station* he had cited Trotsky's comment that, in regard to the American Civil War, the North and the South should not be judged in the same way. Trotsky wrote, "History has different yardsticks for the cruelty of the Northerners and the cruelty of the Southerners in the Civil War. A slave-owner who through cunning and violence shackles a slave in chains, and a slave who through cunning and violence breaks the chains—let not the contemptible eunuchs tell us that they are equals before a court of morality!" And in *Patriotic Gore* Wilson wrote 800 pages (and especially page 776, where Trotsky is singled out—Wilson characteristically waited to the end to deliver his main argument) to tell us that the contemptible eunuchs may have a point, and the idea of historical yardsticks is merely cant to justify the innumerable crimes that people like Trotsky have committed in the course of modern times.

The famous remark by Bruce Catton—that Wilson knew everything about the Civil War except what it was about—is quite unfair. In every war there are, by definition, at least two notions of what it is about, and what Wilson knew was the definition that went down to defeat: that America's Civil War was about federal tyranny and state's rights, about the freedom of local self-government, and about the need to resist. Alexander Stephens, the Confederate Vice President, identified the enemy as "the Demon of Centralism, Absolutism, Despotism." Wilson didn't disagree. The Northern opponents of Lincoln who sympathized with the Confederacy, even if they did not admire slavery, were called "copperheads," and, via the pacifist anti-statism of the 1950s and '60s, *Patriotic Gore* was a copperhead book, in a tepid way. Wilson wrote, "There are moments when one may wonder today—as one's living becomes more and more hampered by the exactions of centralized bureaucracies of both the state and the federal authorities—whether it may not be true, as Stephens said, that the cause of the South is the cause of us all."

It's appropriate to observe that, on the topic of African Americans, Wilson tended to slip into a vulgarity that was otherwise not characteristic of him. The word "nigger" pops up pretty frequently in his writings of the 1920s and '30s, and with its customary nasty spin. He wrote some outrageously racist short stories in the '20s, set in an exoticized New Orleans, and as late as 1957 saw fit to reprint them in *The American Earthquake.* Taine's idea that race forms a component of the literary imagination never disappeared from Wilson's mind; and if, on the basis of his own racial generalizing, Wilson tended to admire the Jews and to picture them constantly reverting to the magnificent traits of their remote Hebrew ancestors, the way Jack London's dogs revert to wolves, he tended to regard the American blacks with a contempt that diminished only slightly with the years.

The civil rights movement of the 1950s and '60s was not a faraway event for him. His friends at *Liberation* magazine were on the front line: Muste was an influence on Martin Luther King, and Muste's comrade Bayard Rustin was himself a major civil rights leader. But Wilson's enthusiasm for *Liberation*'s plucky spirit of resistance stayed confined to the part about banning the bomb. His main sympathy in regard to civil rights, expressed several times in *The Bit Between My Teeth* and *Upstate*, lay with the Southern whites. Of course he was not so dense as to fail to appreciate James Baldwin and a few personal friends who happened to be black.

Nothing overtly racist creeps into *Patriotic Gore*, but neither is there much indignation about slavery, nor even much attention to the literature that slavery produced, aside from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (about which Wilson is masterful). In Trotsky's phrase, the cunning and the violence of the slave-owners are condemned in Wilson's book with no more passion than the cunning and the violence of the slaves trying to break their chains. And so the great critic who interpreted Lenin and Bolshevism in such a peculiar way during the 1930s, by standing his old idea about science and Marxism on its head, ended up interpreting Lincoln and the Union cause just as peculiarly in the 1960s. And to have been the sort of naïve boy from New Jersey who found Stendhal excessively cynical, and then to have gone off to stack corpses in the First World War; to have had a literary heart, yet always to have rejected any division between literature and life, so that love of literature led willy-nilly into political fields where his native instinct was sometimes out of its depth; to have been angry, and not to have been able to find a reliable political or literary philosophy to express his anger—that was hard, hard.

## IV.

There is something poignant in Wilson's life and in his writings, too, not because he stumbled in his judgments now and then, but because of his relations with women. He was a man with a lot of sexual energy, and the energy figured all along in his literary passions—originally, because he sublimated the sexuality in his readings of the classics (as he tells us in *A Prelude*); later, because the Symbolist writers who so much excited him were the first of the moderns to take up sexual themes in a more or less explicit fashion; later still, because his frustration at the Symbolist writers was not just political and social but came from the sleepy Symbolist tendency to prefer imaginary lovers over real ones; later again because he set out in his work to carry the Symbolist achievement another step and to write about the sex of real life, not just of an imaginary ideal.

Yet real life was not especially kind to him in matters of sex. To be shy with women or, rather, to be incapable of coping with women much at all; to be too sensitive and anguished and boozy to conduct a love life in any kind of reasonable way; to find oneself far too bruised to cope with women who happened to be strong and willful, yet to be attracted to those women especially, the brainy flashy ones, the firebrands: that was part of the spirit that came out of the First World War. It was the theme of Wilson's novelist friends in the 1920s, and Wilson was once again, in his young years, a character from out of those novels. It was only at the age of 25, in 1920, that he had his first love, and the results were what any reader of Fitzgerald or Hemingway would have expected.

The bookish young war veteran fell into the fearful clutches of Edna St. Vincent Millay. But she was far too merry, treated him cruelly, wouldn't marry him, left him feeling crushed. After that, nothing went right, except briefly. The first woman who did marry him drifted away rather quickly. Wife No. 2 spent a lot of time in California without him and tripped down a flight of steps and died. There were affairs of the sort that, on one occasion, got him bumps on the head from an outraged husband and, on another occasion, forced him to flee New York for fear of still another husband. Wife No. 3 was an impossible harridan named Mary McCarthy, who married him for his prestige and conducted affairs under his nose and even tried to seduce Dos Passos. And Wilson gave as good as he got. The marriage with McCarthy was the kind that causes the neighbors to call the police, as readers will see with a glance at *Edmund Wilson* by Jeffrey Meyers.

He wanted to marry Anaïs Nin, but she, too, failed to return the feeling; and he wanted to marry a young woman in England, but she married Arthur Koestler instead. Wife No. 4, Elena, was the only woman who made Wilson happy for any length of time, and set him up in a decent home on Cape Cod. But by then



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he was stuck in his ways, and in his old age he spent several months a year away from Elena and their daughter (Wilson's third child, who grew up to become the artist Helen Miranda Wilson), rattling around by himself in an old stone house he had inherited near Utica in upstate New York, trying to seduce the neighbors' wives, occasionally with some mediocre success. Late-life score with the dentist's wife! And again with a film critic in New York!

But of those many wives and loves, only three inspired him to write anything memorable. There was his second wife, Margaret Canby, whose death in 1932 he responded to at length in the single most moving section of his diaries. There was Edna Millay, whom he described in the heartbreaking epilogue to *The Shores of Light* (as well as, less successfully, in his first novel, *I Thought of Daisy*). And there was—this is the sweetly dissonant note in Wilson's love life—a Ukrainian waitress from Brooklyn named Frances (whose last name Meyers has been unable to discover), somebody unbrainy, without flash, an ordinary woman from the hard-pressed immigrant working class. About Frances he wrote a great deal, most importantly in a long section of his second novel, *Memoirs of Hecate County*, called "The Princess with the Golden Hair"—really a novel in itself, quite a good one, which he made the mistake of burying under the weight of *Hecate County*'s other sections.

Wilson met Frances in 1927 at the kind of dance-hall on 14th Street where men would buy tickets for the right to rub themselves against women; and the two of them kept up their affair off and on until 1938. Frances was married to a gangster who was in and out of jail. Her home in Brooklyn was full of hysteria, violence and gonorrhea. The cultural gap between her and Wilson was of the sort that lends itself to Marxist reflections and Dos Passosian techniques of narrative contrast. It was Frances who came to visit Wilson at his shabby wood-frame home on East 53rd Street and watched him cut the pages of a French book and said, as he recorded in *The Thirties*, "Sometimes I think you're the smartest man in the world!" To which he replied, "How do you know I'm not?" And her answer: "You wouldn't be living on East 53rd Street."

His fiction about Frances, "The Princess with the Golden Hair" (where the golden-haired princess happens to be still another girlfriend), shows us, I think, the real Wilson at the age of 35 or 40, the heart laid bare—a man in a state of emotional chaos, filled with contempt for the tennis-playing bourgeoisie of the New York suburbs, where golden-haired princesses dwell, yet unable to leave those people behind; despairing of American society, except insofar as he can imagine, dimly, a Marxist revolution; disdainful of the sources of his own wealth; frustrated in his intellectual work; suffocating in the New York heat; drawn to drink because of its glamour, and the inebriation, and the hint of self-destruction. And he is drawn to women, not mildly either, but desperately, such that, as soon as one woman leaves the room, he is on the phone to another, until he has four affairs going on at once, which is funny, but also a little grim, like the way he lines up highballs.

Three of those women are less than brilliantly described; but when he writes about "Anna," the character modeled on Frances, the tone alters, and the inebriate goes tender, and the "dear dark velvety eyes" of Anna take on the glimmer of a real woman. Meyers, the biographer, doesn't see it that way, but to me (and I'm not the first to notice this) it's plain that Wilson had fallen in love with Frances more ardently than he managed to do with anyone else, except Millay. The narrator and Anna go their separate ways at the end, just as Wilson and Frances did. And you want to cry out, you're making a mistake, don't kid yourself that this is nothing more than an amorous sociological adventure!—even if, speaking realistically, Wilson very likely let himself feel so deeply only because he could always pass off the affair as less than serious.

Yet even with this dear woman Wilson, in his writings, manages to hit some sour notes. It is because of the way he discusses sex. The sexual passages in Wilson's books—in the diaries as well as in *Hecate County* (which in 1946 suffered the double fate, owing to a preposterous charge of pornography, of being suppressed by the police and simultaneously elevated to best-sellerdom)—have always driven readers a little crazy. The effect on Jeffrey Meyers has been devastating. Meyers has put a reasonable amount of work into his biography. He has had the wisdom to secure a letter about Wilson from Isaiah Berlin, one of Wilson's closest friends, and to publish the letter at length, and he has sprinkled the book with some astute observations on politics (though not so much on literature); and between Berlin's commentary and a number of other shrewd biographical maneuvers, *Edmund Wilson* would have made a pretty good chronicle of Wilson's life, if only Meyers could have contained his response to the sex writings.

But no such luck. The biographer can't get over those passages. He leers at some of the more gynecological paragraphs from the diary, then shows how Wilson cannibalized the diary in *Hecate County*, which allows the biographer the greasy pleasure of typing out the same misbegotten passage a second time. Wilson is ludicrously presented to us as "one of the great literary fornicators of all time," which in a world that has seen Frank Harris and Theodore Dreiser and Henry Miller could hardly be the case; and in the fornicatory spirit, Meyers succeeds in lowering Wilson's every affair to the level of the biological and the perverse. Even the attractions of Edna Millay end up stripped of any touch of literary talent or personal brilliance. You end up wanting to kick Meyers's biography across the room. There is something repulsive about the book.

But it must be acknowledged that Wilson set himself up for that kind of treatment. The rehearsing of sexual details in his diaries and other writings, the moistness and odors that are always trickling through the sexual passages, the strangely clinical tone he adopts—these things make Wilson seem a very cold fish, fascinated by sex with a crudeness that women were not likely to feel for him in return. Even when he means to be charming he goes off pitch. "Her white bosom"—this is his soon-to-be-wife Elena, described in *The Forties*—"with the pink just above it looked like a delicious ice-cream brick with strawberry against vanilla." You do wonder what he thought he was accomplishing in those passages, apart from the obvious purposes of trying to heighten his own experience and allowing himself to relive his triumphs. I think that he was doing exactly what he did when he devoted long dull passages to nature description in the diaries. He was operating on Whitehead's belief that there is no dualism between landscape and feeling, or between body and soul. To record the one is to express the other.

He was trying to give his writing a sensual dimension, and by writing those passages over and over, like a musician practicing scales, he was trying to accustom himself to what didn't come naturally—to be more like Joyce and Lawrence, whose writings on sex he admired (except when he didn't). Only, alas. In *The Thirties* and again in *The Shores of Light* he reflected that maybe the English language was to blame, and the words for sex in French were smoother, and the difficulties he encountered weren't his fault at all, even if Joyce and Lawrence seemed to have no such problems. In any case, the effect, apart from taking the erotic bloom off *Hecate County* and allowing his critics and his slightly ghoulish biographer to



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leer and jeer, is to give us what I think is a wrong impression of himself as a man.

For, in spite of everything, quite a few women did find Wilson attractive. It was not because of his looks. At the age of 45 he was already 200 pounds, distributed over a body that was 5' 6", with no hair on top to make him taller—a short and pudgy figure with the fleshy face of Herbert Hoover gazing at you from on top (to borrow a description from William Barrett's memoirs). The attractiveness must have come from an inner heat—from his intelligence, of course, and maybe in later years from his status and reputation, yet also, let us suppose, from the sensual appreciation for women that he was always trying to put into words and could never get right. Nin commented (as Meyers tells us), "Contrary to his academic, formal, classical work, and the cold intellectual criticism"—the feminist pornographer was not a huge admirer of the essays of Edmund Wilson—"he himself is fervent, irrational, lustful, violent." Sexy, in a word. Which you would never guess from reading him.

The gap between the man and his own image on the page is surely Wilson's most heartbreaking trait. No one has ever devoted himself more heroically to getting his thoughts and impressions into printed words. Those thirty-odd books of his fan out through every mode of literary expression—criticism, history, politics, fiction, poetry, drama, journalism and diaries—as if to leave no door unopened. The sheer variety and mass account for a good deal of his greatness, which is why it is better to read him at length than simply to pick out the high points. You make your way through several dozen essays, and you find yourself growing fond of Wilson. You feel that he is never trying to deceive his readers, either about his own thoughts and feelings or about the degree of his knowledge—except once in a while when he put on a show (and was blown to smithereens by Nabokov).

You feel that Wilson speaks for a large and serious culture—for the culture that the American elite, if there were such a thing, would possess. It is a culture of keen morality, of democratic egalitarianism (with the predictable blindspots on race), of disdain for the shoddy and the exploitative, of vivid appreciation for English and American literature and for French literature, too, a culture of experimentation and flexibility, not too preoccupied with tradition. The fact that Wilson was descended from a cousin of Cotton Mather's (not from Cotton Mather himself, as Meyers says) is no small point. The great American critics in the twentieth century, quite a number of them, have had immigrant sensibilities, and have wanted to embrace what was not theirs by ancestry, and have made outsider enthusiasm into their gift and insight; but this thing that they have wanted to embrace, that arouses their love and enthusiasm—this thing is what Wilson already has.

By presenting himself to us so unstintingly, by displaying the entire range of his values and his opinions and his learning, he makes it a pleasure to follow him to whatever new and exotic place his curiosity and the logic of his life might lead. Russian literature? Haitian novelists, Iroquois or Zuni customs, ancient Hebrew? His own love affairs? The Marquis de Sade? Or unexotic places: the novelists of upstate New York? It is a delight to trudge behind, listening to his discoveries and observations. If now and then we shake our heads in disagreement or dismay, we keep reading nonetheless, as if the long shelf of Wilson's books were a single giant novel and he himself its adventure-seeking hero, suffering the ups and downs that any hero might expect. And yet there's no escaping that Wilson never managed to express some last crucial element of that hero's personality. The giant novel was somehow not quite giant enough. The ambition that he had conceived, to be regular and logical as well as tender and violent, to be scientific as well as mysterious, to be lucid and yet to capture the fluid and the vague, to be classical and romantic at once, to be like Flaubert yet also like Shelley and Wordsworth, to be a full man, expressing all—that was beyond his powers. •

# *It Takes a Family*

**BY ELIZABETH FOX-GENOVESE**

## The Vulnerable Child: What Really Hurts America's Children and What We Can Do About It by Richard Weissbourd

**(Addison Wesley, 280 pp., $20)**

Once upon a time, and not so long ago, Americans viewed childhood as a state of carefree, protected innocence. No more. And yet the purportedly quintessential childhoods commemorated in Peter Pan, the March girls, Christopher Robin and "Leave It to Beaver" were themselves the products of specific historical circumstances. Following the pioneering work of Philippe Ariès, historians since the 1960s have rejected the idea of childhood as a distinct and universal stage of development. Our idea of childhood took shape, in fact, in Europe during the early modern period; before then, children had been viewed as miniature adults. Significantly, many historians have also discerned a close association between the appearance of the idea of childhood and the emergence of the nuclear family, companionate marriage and, especially, the modern idea of motherhood.

But now, if we credit our senses, we are leaving the age of childhood and reverting to the age of children as miniature adults. With each passing day the rosy view of childhood seems to recede further behind the awful realities of many children's lives. The news that American children are in trouble is not new, at least not to those who pay even perfunctory attention to the evidence, which is everywhere. Lurid stories of children abandoned, abused, battered or murdered by the adults they most trust, frequently their own parents, appear prominently in the media. But the sense that childhood should offer something better continues to haunt us. Even the most hard-bitten among us still shudders at the image of a 10, 12 or 14 year old's cool, intentional murder of another child. If the disquieting number of teen suicides seems to receive less attention than a few years ago, it still ranks as a national shame, and there is no reason to take lightly the evidence of drug and alcohol abuse by teenagers, and of pregnancies among teens, not to mention younger children. We are living in the midst of children who are anxious, afraid, pressured or disoriented, and they are too many to number.

The childhood of the past, to be sure, was rarely all it was cracked up to be. Children have always suffered the anxieties that attend growing up. Neither confidence nor competence spring full-



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blown, as if by the stroke of a fairy godmother's wand. They must be won, frequently at the price of what children experience as pain and suffering. All children must learn, in one way or another, to separate from parents, to make friends with peers, to find a place in the world. The psychiatric and psychological literature abounds with scenarios of personal development, individuation and the travails that frequently characterize both. Family closets have always contained the skeletons of parental failures and their cost to children. And more often than not, the "traditional" family concealed (more or less successfully) the scars of men's abuse of women and children, of both parents' proclivity to smack children around, of children's notorious capacity for cruelty to one another.

We have long since lost, in other words, the illusions we once had of childhood's blissful innocence and families' natural warmth. But this worldly realism about childhood and families has also fostered a cynicism that tempts people to give up on family life and, frequently, on childhood as well. In recent years, powerful and bewildering impersonal forces have weakened families and accelerated the demise of childhood. During the past three decades, women, including married women and mothers, have entered the labor force in unprecedented numbers. By the early 1990s, more than half the mothers of children under 3 were working for wages. Today the typical working woman is a mother or likely to become one, and the typical mother is a working woman. Spurred by no-fault divorce, the number of divorces has spiraled. The divorce rate tripled between 1960 and 1982, and as many as half of the children born during the early 1980s will be children of divorced parents. The increase in single (including never-married) mothers has followed the same steep rise. Today more than 25 percent of all children are born to mothers who have never been married, and the percentage of such African American children is much higher.

Even families that benefit from the presence of both parents live with accelerating external pressures, including the need to accommodate the work schedules of both parents, and are less and less likely to sit down regularly to dinner together. Meanwhile the pressures on children themselves continue to mount. While the economic necessity for education, especially for college education, increases by leaps and bounds, many schools seem to be deteriorating. The fragility of family incomes, which has already pushed many women into the workplace, is placing increased pressure on teenage children to carry some part-time work in addition to their schooling, or on even younger children to miss school entirely to care for a younger or older member of the family who cannot be left alone. The sacralization of consumer goods, and the proliferation of sex and violence in the media, defies precise measurement, but surely contributes to various forms of childhood and adolescent anxiety. Wherever we turn, we confront social, cultural and economic patterns that seem to be cutting the remaining shreds of childhood out from under children's feet.

In his valuable book, Richard Weissbourd traces the impact of these and other developments in the lives of children whom he has interviewed and charts the prevailing tendencies for children in general. A clear-eyed focus upon the vulnerabilities that all children share lies at the center of his argument, though his specific cases tend to focus on the poor more than the affluent. Weissbourd forcefully contests our disturbing inclination to localize the problems of children among the poor, notably African Americans and inner-city residents. Only ignorance, or the desperate wish to believe that the worst vulnerability of children obtains only for other people's children, can explain the persistent view that truly miserable or alienated children are the products of extreme poverty or social pathology. The view of disadvantaged children as the product of poor and broken homes, plagued by abuse, and trapped in the web of their parents' or their own drug use—this belief leads to the fatalism according to which the children are caught in a cycle that destines them to failure.

Weissbourd acknowledges some truth in the images of "pregnant, crack-addicted African-American girls, and marauding, Uzi-toting African-American boys." He further allows that poverty and single-parenthood can disastrously complicate the business of growing up. Yet he repeatedly reminds us that poverty and single-parenthood alone do not begin to account for the misery of many children's lives, or for the numbers of miserable children. More than 30 percent of American children suffer poverty at some point in their lives, but only about 8 percent are poor for more than six years. Less than 20 percent of poor children (17.5 percent), including African American children (19 percent), live in a ghetto, and the rest are evenly distributed among cities, suburbs and non-metropolitan areas. Even those who live in ghettos may suffer less from the highly dramatized problems of neglect, abuse, gangs, crime and teen pregnancy than from such grinding, corrosive problems of everyday life as inadequate grocery stores in the neighborhood, insufficient public transportation, lack of hot water or heat, inappropriate or inadequate clothing, or indifference of teachers and other public authorities. Conversely, as the many adult Americans who were poor children during the Great Depression or in the segregated South know, poor children may grow up to lead happy, productive lives.

There are fewer poor children today than at any time in the past, and so there is reason to applaud Weissbourd's determination to demystify poverty as the predominant cause of children's disadvantage. Yet that demystification itself constitutes something of a sleight of hand. Weissbourd wants to shatter the complacent view that poor children differ radically from other children, not least, one suspects, because he wants to garner support for general programs. And tax-paying citizens are indeed more generous in support of programs that benefit their children as well as the less fortunate. But even Weissbourd is hard pressed to advance very many examples of comfortably middle-class children who suffer disadvantages as visible as poor children suffer every day.

There are, in fact, plenty of "disadvantaged" middle-class children, not to mention the proverbial "poor little rich kids." More often than not, however, their troubles stem precisely from the psychological burdens of divorce, neglect or covert abuse, although divorce frequently throws middle-class children into poverty, at least for a while. Nor does the idea that most children only suffer passing episodes of poverty offer great reason for encouragement, since even a brief period of deprivation may decisively mark a child's life. And the miseries of the middle-class child who unexpectedly experiences a bout of poverty should remind us that poverty means something very different in our society, with its simultaneous fixations on consumption and equality, than it did in the past.

Notwithstanding public myths of the underclass, neither poverty, nor the single motherhood with which it is so frequently associated, nor even life on the mean streets, condemns children to the dust heap. Weissbourd argues forcefully that most children "are vulnerable because of a chain of interactions involving their own attributes and the attributes of their families, schools,



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and communities." Consider the case of Michael Moran, whom Weissbourd invokes throughout the book. After Michael's birth, his mother, Cora, suffered from depression, which his tendency to colic probably exacerbated. She believes that she mothered him too much by the book, rather than out of spontaneous love. When he was 2, Cora threw her husband out after discovering that he was having an affair. Following the divorce, Michael became increasingly uneasy and agitated. In nursery school, he had difficulty establishing relations with other children and rapidly became the butt of their merciless teasing.

In the years following the divorce, Cora and her two boys had to move because of the loss of her husband's income. She went on welfare for a brief period, but then she returned to work, which left her less time for Michael. Meanwhile his difficulties at school went from bad to worse, until the day on which the teacher called to tell her that Michael was under a desk with his hands over his ears and was screaming that he would not come out. The crisis alerted Cora to the depth of Michael's problems, but their alleviation would require years of effort and frustrating struggles with innumerable unresponsive institutions.

Weissbourd displays a rare sensitivity to the innumerable small and large difficulties that may set a child's downward spiral in motion, especially when the child is poor. Although a good three-quarters of poor children start school with no sign of developmental delay, many teachers do not expect them to be able to learn and, accordingly, neither challenge nor help them to do so. Then there are the children who do not have adequate food, which impedes their concentration. (One of Weissbourd's few examples of the vulnerability of affluent children concerns the daughter of professional parents who arrived at school each day with a lunch of potato chips and a Coke.) The lack of proper eyeglasses helps to account for many poor children's difficulties with reading, which the absence of books from the home or libraries from the neighborhood compounds. Various undiagnosed or misdiagnosed health problems, some caused by lead poisoning or other attributes of inadequate housing, may readily result in a child's being labeled stupid, difficult or beyond help. Children who react to a teacher's lack of confidence in their abilities or to other children's cruelty may find themselves, like Michael Moran, pushed into special education classes or, if they submit quietly, left to wallow in their misery.

Time and again Weissbourd returns to the specific concatenation of events that shape any child's life, reminding us that tragedy results from the contingent and accidental more than from a single dramatic cause. The book as a whole exudes his admirable empathy for each child as a particular individual with a particular history. He consistently refuses to slip into the easy attitude that some groups of children are, by definition, beyond help, and much of the book consists in examples of the ways in which even the most apparently intractable children may be helped.

Weissbourd especially values and generously praises programs such as the Comer schools in New Haven, Connecticut, the Parkside office of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services, and neighborhood police programs in New Haven and Dorchester, Massachusetts. In all these cases, Weissbourd emphasizes the importance of flexibility and respect in public institutions' response to the troubles that bedevil individuals and communities. Time and again, he returns to the value of education and psychological training for the administrators, teachers, social workers and police who serve disadvantaged children and their families. And he especially argues for the importance of prevention—for working with children and communities before a disastrous crisis erupts.

Real prevention, Weissbourd insists, requires the coordinated efforts of entire towns and cities. In his view, many "sectors of society can advance these prevention efforts. For example, the media, rather than focusing on tragic failure, could highlight successful child protective services interventions and analyze the underlying elements that produce them. Businesses, universities and other community services and agencies clearly have a role not only in strengthening families but in educating the public about signs of neglect and abuse, and in encouraging parents to seek help before abuse occurs." Prevention, he repeatedly reminds us, "is more than providing good health, social and education services for families. It is creating environments that ease the task of parenting and that provide stimulation and support to children at every stage of development."

Weissbourd clearly understands that parenting is hard work, but he dwells less on what children need from parents than what both parents and children need from society. "Important as family and friendship are to children, across the political spectrum there is a growing consensus that both children and parents depend on wider nets of social ties, on communities." And, predictably, we are reminded of "the popular African proverb," according to which "it takes a village to raise a child." And our "villages" are unraveling: "the disintegration of communities has placed children in serious jeopardy." Few would quarrel with the claim that the disintegration of schools or the infestation of neighborhoods by drug dealers, among other crying evils, jeopardize children. But what of the collapse of two-parent families?

Weissbourd worries that undue emphasis upon the importance of a resident father to a child's prosperity and productivity might add stigmatization to the troubles that already shadow children of divorced or never-married mothers. Few would disagree about our responsibility to help all children feel respect for themselves and for others regardless of family circumstances. But here I think that Weissbourd's empathy may have gotten the better of him. It is a big—and in my view, unjustifiable—leap from the respect that children deserve as individuals to the claim that we should not deplore the proliferation of single-parent families and do everything in our power to strengthen two-parent families.

The point is not that the strengthening of marriages will alone improve the prospects of children; but it seems foolhardy indeed not to place strong marriages high on the list of what children need. The more one reads of Weissbourd's thoughtful and sympathetic proposals for the improvement of children's lives, the more one suspects that his main goal is to train teachers, social workers, law enforcement officers and community leaders to replace parents. He wants all these figures to cultivate the sensitivity of parents to the needs of the individual child. His telling criticisms of bureaucratic rigidity ultimately point toward a transformation of institutions into informal networks that, like families, can respond appropriately to a myriad of different individual needs.

This goal of flexibility and understanding can hardly be faulted. Even if it were attained, however, it could not adequately substitute for the people with whom children live. Weissbourd knows that any child's first need lies in feeling himself or herself the most important thing in the world to someone; and surely that is a need which even the best trained, most caring and most enlightened professions are unlikely to fill. Moreover, Weissbourd himself remains distressingly cautious



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about the responses we may reasonably expect from the public sector. He takes hope from the evidence of innovative schools, but he acknowledges that only a few hundred among the 83,000 public schools in the country have moved in this direction. He takes hope from a handful of flexible social service agencies, but he acknowledges that their success, like that of many of the schools, depends upon the presence of a charismatic and dedicated individual. He takes hope from the two policemen who walk the beat in Dorchester, but he acknowledges that both of them are over 50 and wonders if any will be tempted to replace them.

In his important book Weissbourd clarifies much, and yet he has no adequate reply to the "traditionalists" who insist upon policies that give priority to the two-parent family and certainly do not advocate the stigmatization of children raised by a single parent. Above all, he shows that all children, regardless of background, need a judicious mixture of adequate resources and attentive, demanding love. The village does play a role in the provision of resources for lack of which too many children still falter—up to a point. It can never provide the selfless, tough, indefatigable love without which no child can thrive.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of schools, social services and police forces. In our overwhelming world, no family can reasonably count upon going it alone. But if a man of Richard Weissbourd's intelligence and dedication has anything to teach us, it is that those who insist upon the need for a village to raise a child invariably begin by trying to teach the agents of the village to provide what D.W. Winnicott called "good enough" mothering and fathering. If all we need is for the agents of the village to behave like good enough parents, then why do we not begin by encouraging the parents who know the child best to do the job themselves? Then, when they need help, as most parents do, we can encourage the agents of the village to behave like good enough public servants. If we cannot do this much, we may as well acknowledge the demise of childhood as we have known it.

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# *A Life and a Fate*

**BY WALTER LAQUEUR**

## The Bones of Berdichev: The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman by John and Carol Garrard

**(The Free Press, 437 pp., $27.50)**

Vasily Grossman was an important writer now half forgotten, and his story, as the authors of this book have understood, is also the story of an aspect of the tragedy of East European Jewry that has been suppressed. Berdichev is a town in Ukraine. Once upon a time it had the second-largest Jewish community in the Russian empire. Today, bones are what remain of this community—and this by accident. The special unit set up by Himmler in 1943 to obliterate the traces of the sites and installations of the mass murder of the Jews somehow never got around to complete its work in this Ukrainian town, since the Soviet army was advancing very quickly. And under Soviet rule the mounds were also left untouched. Perhaps they were forgotten. Perhaps it was thought that it might be dangerous, owing to the proximity of a nuclear installation, to engage in major construction work. In any event, it came to pass that Berdichev became the location of the largest mass grave in Europe.

Vasily Grossman was not one of the greatest Russian writers of the twentieth century, as the Garrards insist, but he was certainly one of the most interesting and tragic figures. A comparison with Solzhenitsyn seems apposite. Solzhenitsyn had the good fortune to see his books published in his lifetime and became a figure of world renown. What if his books had been published thirty years after his death? A few thousand readers would have paid attention, but public interest would have been small, and he would have been one among many. This, broadly speaking, has been Grossman's fate.

Grossman was born in Berdichev, not into a traditional Yiddish-speaking family, as the *Encyclopedia Judaica* reports, but, as the Garrards show, into a highly assimilated "modern" family, and he did not know Yiddish at all. He trained as an engineer in Moscow, but his heart was in writing. One of his earliest efforts, a novel of 1934 called *In a Town Named Berdichev* (many years later it became the film *Commissar*) was praised by Gorky, which opened up a literary career for Grossman.

The Second World War gave Grossman his chance. He was not a member of the Communist Party, but the army daily *Red Star* hired him as a war correspondent, and it was in this capacity that he participated in the battle of Stalingrad and in other crucial military operations. Grossman was utterly fearless. He covered the fighting not from headquarters but from the front lines. He became immensely popular and his essays and novels were read in millions of copies. But the war was for him a turning point also in another sense. Much as he admired the courage of the Russian soldier, he also witnessed much corruption and cruelty, and his belief in the communist system was eventually broken.

And there was another great trauma. This was the destruction of millions of Jews. For his obsession with that disaster, Grossman ran into serious trouble with the authorities. Though he had not previously revealed a great interest in Jewish affairs, he thought he owed it to his mother (who had been killed by the Germans at Berdichev) to edit, together with Ilya Ehrenburg, the *Black Book of Soviet Jews*, a compilation of documents and eyewitness accounts, on which work had started by the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee while the war was still going on. But soon after the war ended, the campaign against the "Cosmopolitans" was underway; and the book could not be published, except, by an oversight, in Hungary. (It was first published in Israel, in Russian, many years later.)

Then Grossman's other writings came under attack. Had he been a Yiddish writer, he would have been shot with the other Yiddish writers in 1952, not long before Stalin's death. But Grossman wrote in Russian, and so he survived the purge. Yet Grossman's tribulations were by no means over. He was a tenacious man, but also a naïve one. He put the insights gained during the war at Stalingrad into a long novel called *Life and Fate* (completed in 1960), the basic idea of which was that "we must never make peace with evil." This book covers events during the years 1942-43, and its message was that the Soviet regime, all



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things considered, had not been very different from the Nazi regime. That daring theme was further developed in Grossman's very last work, begun in 1955, a novella entitled *Forever Flowing*, in which he argued that something had gone wrong in Russian history. Could it have been a mere accident that such a regime had come to power and gained the support of a considerable part of the people? Why had Russia never been free?

These were important questions; but it is a little astonishing that a man with Grossman's experience and knowledge of Soviet conditions could have believed that works such as his could ever be published under the Communist regime. To this riddle, this excellent biography does not provide a conclusive answer. Grossman submitted the manuscript countless times to leading literary magazines. Didn't he know that it would land on the desk of the KGB? Perhaps he assumed that, since the Soviet system was highly legalistic, it was safer to follow "socialist legality" to the letter, for in that case it was unlikely that he would be arrested. And so it happened that, when the KGB came to his apartment in September 1961, they had an order to arrest the manuscripts of *Life and Fate*, but not to arrest their author. (The term "arrest" was probably used here for the first time in the history of literature in connection with a manuscript rather than a human being.)

Undeterred, Grossman went to the Central Committee and eventually wrote a letter to Khrushchev, who asked Mikhail Suslov, the Politburo member in charge of ideological affairs, to deal with this strange case. Suslov told Grossman that he (meaning Grossman) was an honest man, that he had chosen the right course of action—namely, addressing the party rather than trying to publish his book abroad. But his book, Suslov told him, would bring comfort to the enemies of the Soviet Union and the enemies of peace. The party ideologist suggested that the writer go back to the pattern of his early work and write the sort of novels that were wanted and needed by the people. Suslov also told him what other literary officials had told Grossman before, that in 250 years the time might be ripe to publish *Life and Fate*. Wisely, Grossman kept the existence of *Forever Flowing* a secret.

That was the end of his literary career. Grossman felt buried alive, even though he was permitted to travel inside the Soviet Union. For the Communists, he was a dangerous deviationist, and the liberals considered him a socialist realist hack. (They did not know about Grossman's philosophical novel and his novella.) Soon afterward he fell ill of cancer, and he died in 1964. But the KGB had not succeeded in seizing all his manuscripts. Both *Life and Fate* and *Forever Flowing* were smuggled abroad. *Forever Flowing* was published in Russian in Germany, in 1970 and again in 1984, but hardly anyone noticed. *Life and Fate* came out in German and French in 1980, but no one even considered an English translation. Finally, in 1988, the novel eventually came out in a leading Moscow literary magazine, much to the annoyance of the Communists and extreme nationalists, who considered it anti-patriotic. (It appeared in English in 1985.) Even the *Black Book* eventually saw the light, in Lithuania in late 1993.

The Garrards' book is important also for its documentation of the extent of the collaboration of local populations in the murder of the Jews. When Grossman returned to Berdichev with the advancing Russian armies, he was among the first to interview the few Jewish survivors. They told him, as they subsequently told a state commission, that there had been collaboration on a broad scale between the Ukrainian police and the Germans. The idea that two dozen Germans had killed 30,000 Jews was preposterous. The Ukrainian police had participated not only in the round-up of the Jews, but also in the actual killing; and the property of the Jews had been looted by their neighbors. In this respect, Berdichev had been the rule rather than the exception.

The Soviet authorities were unwilling to accept these facts. It is true that a few leading collaborators were executed after 1944 and more were sent to a prison camp, but to admit the whole truth would have been tantamount to conceding that the Soviet regime had been very unpopular, and this, of course, was inconceivable. For this reason, Grossman was unable to put on paper what he heard and saw. The Soviet line all along was "not to divide the dead." A great many Russian civilians were killed during the war; but what the Communists forbade was an admission that many Russians, Ukrainians and others collaborated with the invaders, and that most Russians and Ukrainians survived whereas most Jews did not. The issue of collaboration has been a painful one in most European countries, but at least attempts have been made to confront the unpleasant facts. In the former Soviet Union, such a confrontation has yet to begin.

WALTER LAQUEUR's *Fascism: Past, Present, Future* has just been published by Oxford University Press.

**TRB** *continued from page 6*

arming Hezbollah and assassinating Iranian exiles in Europe. With this kind of foreign policy there can be no peace.

But there is another Iranian foreign policy, one that exists alongside the radicalism of the militants, one whose aims are consistent with the ambitions of any regional power. Iran is a country of 65 million people, over twice the size of Iraq, surrounded by unstable states and dangerous regimes. Pakistan and India to its east are assumed to possess nuclear weapons. Central Asia, a traditional sphere of interest, is in the midst of a major upheaval, and Afghanistan's civil war has so far poured over 2 million refugees into Iran. Iran was invaded by Iraq in 1980 and fought an eight-year war against Saddam Hussein. Securing Iran's borders—by forging links with Russia and Central Asia, or by rebuilding the military—is something any regime in Tehran, Islamic or not, would find prudent. To say that Iran's concerns in this neighborhood are understandable is not to say that it should be given a free hand to dominate the Gulf. But it is to say that separating such regional policies from aid to terrorists is both simple and necessary.

The history of U.S. relations with the Islamic republic, dating back to the hostage crisis, does not offer much encouragement. But this administration seems more determined than any of its predecessors to grind Iran into the ground economically and strangle it diplomatically and militarily. Indeed, Clinton himself has said that Iran represents "an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy and economy of the United States." Iran has become the all-purpose bogeyman for an administration that has found itself increasingly frustrated by its inability to close the deal on the Middle East peace process and incapable of meeting the terrorist threat of Islamic fundamentalists. And so Syria's responsibility for Hezbollah is papered over, and Saudi Arabia's aid to fundamentalist groups virtually ignored.

But the bogeyman has no clothes. The Islamic revolution has failed. It has had no success in exporting its brand of militant theocracy, it has been unable to recreate a modern economy, it has sacrificed a million lives in a senseless war with Iraq, and it hasn't even been able to fill the mosques. And yet it has succeeded in provoking in the U.S. a degree of hostility that is out of proportion to its present threat. This hostility is an achievement that Tehran's extremists in no way deserve. It is time to look at what Iran does, and not at what it says.

**NADER MOUSAVIZADEH**



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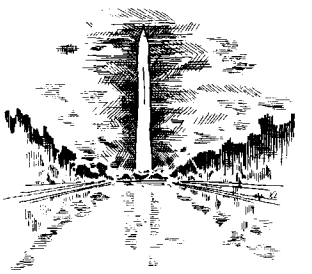
# WASHINGTON DIARIST

## Out of character

AT THIS POINT, WITH AMERICAN troops breezily tossing footballs in Bosnia and U.S.-Chinese relations back down to defcon three after the Taiwanese elections, foreign policy doesn't look like a central issue in the presidential campaign. Then again, for Bob Dole no issue is central except to the degree it can serve as a metaphor for "character," which is in turn a euphemism for ... well, you know. And for this purpose, we are told, foreign policy can be important. That is why Dole's big, serious, destined-to-be-a-*Foreign Affairs*-centerfold speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies last week seemed a little disjointed. I'm sure the Dole foreign-policy wonks debated with Talmudic devotion the merits of endorsing bilateral (North-South Korea) non-proliferation talks rather than the four-power (U.S., China, North and South Korea) discussions suggested by the Clinton administration. But, except for the few Fallowsian obsessives who savor the wee paragraphs of a *New York Times* excerpt, that wasn't the story. More important—and therefore presumably dictated not by luminaries like Jeane Kirkpatrick but by focus groups who couldn't care less about which Koreans talk to which—were the adjectives Dole used to describe the president's foreign policy. Most could have applied to affairs both foreign and domestic: "untrusted," "double-talk," "weakness," "coddling." I was half expecting to hear the president denounced for America's lack of "fidelity" to its allies. But, after all, it's only May.

DOLE'S FOREIGN POLICY DIFFERences with Clinton don't add up to much. But then Clinton's differences with Bush, except for a relatively unsuccessful and increasingly sidelined focus on trade, were nothing to get excited about either. To his credit, Dole's been more honest about this than Clinton was in 1992. He's backed the president on Dayton and MFN for China, while candidate Clinton sniped at Bush on MFN, the Bosnian arms embargo and Haitian refugees, only to reverse himself in office. This willingness to agree may say something about Dole's character, but it's not the kind of thing his advisers trumpet. The real point of Dole's quibbles, they say, is the "incoherence" and "inconsistency" of Clinton's foreign policy. This "inconsistency" attack (with its vague evocations of battlefield and bedroom) may do Dole some good, as long as no one interprets it as having to do with actual foreign policy. If they did, and Dole really articulated a "consistent" and "coherent" theory of international affairs, the world would quake with fear, and he'd fall another twenty points behind.

CONSIDER THE FOREIGN POLICY theory that carries the most weight among non-pitchforked Republicans (i.e., those who believe that America should try to influence the world rather than simply keep it from influencing us). This school, which includes Dole confidantes like Kirkpatrick and former Reagan Assistant Secretary of Defense Richard Perle, might be called neo-conservative moralism. Its proponents want to ditch Clinton's emphasis on economic competition and multilateralism and pick up where Ronald Reagan left off, leading an American crusade against tyranny. Fine, except that Reagan's war for American ideology was also a war for American national interests, and the two held together because the United States faced an ideological rival that was also a global threat. Without the strategic purpose that allowed Reagan to make allies of some tyrannies (Guatemala, Zaire) in order to weaken others (the USSR, Nicaragua), post-cold war, neo-con moralism looks considerably nuttier.



THE COVER STORY OF LAST WEEK'S *Standard*, a proposed "GOP Contract with the World," by Michael Ledeen, occupant of the American Enterprise Institute's Freedom Chair, is particularly wild. "No more money to tyrants. Period.... No most-favored-nation status to a China that exploits slave labor, tortures and murders its own democrats, and intimidates democratic neighbors. No aid to Russia so long as the Yeltsin regime brazenly violates its agreements with us and marches on its neighbors. No aid to a Bulgarian regime...." You get the picture. This is actually Carterism, a noble moral impulse applied consistently; in other words, with no regard to real-world trade-offs. If the U.S. imposed sanctions on China, for instance, while also cutting ties to authoritarian Indonesia, we would cause panic among those who share our strategic aims in the region. And if the neo-cons think America can pressure Beijing without support from our allies, they might note Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng's trip last month to France, where he rewarded Jacques Chirac for refraining from "pointless comments" on human rights by ordering thirty-three planes from Airbus rather than Boeing.

BOB DOLE, UNLIKE, SAY, NEWT GINGrich, doesn't seem like a guy willing to sacrifice more than two dozen votes in Seattle for a "consistent" foreign policy propelled by a "coherent" ideological vision. That, I think, is a mark in his favor. After all, America's current strategic conflicts are not especially ideological. Resurgent Chinese and Russian nationalism don't pose a philosophical challenge to American principles, and, as particularist visions, they can't rally a constituency beyond their borders. They require alert American responses to maintain a balance of power in regions where the Soviet Union's demise has left a vacuum. And the ideology that has proven most effective in preserving balances of power is national interest.

ONE ADVANTAGE OF NOT HAMMERing out another grand, seamless foreign affairs vision so soon after the demise of the last one is that the U.S. doesn't have to pretend to know how every other country should organize its domestic affairs. This, of course, is anathema to triumphalists like Ledeen, who dares "to state openly what the rest of the world takes for granted: the superiority of American civilization." But the value of democracy's expansion is precisely the opposite: that many different peoples can now claim participatory government for their own, rather than admitting, as Ledeen believes they should, that such principles belong to a foreign, higher civilization.

THE LESS JINGOISTIC THE U.S. IS about these principles the more interesting the prospects for cross-fertilization. For instance, Americans have been wringing their hands about the potential for civil war if the Communists win Russia's June elections. But I haven't heard one suggestion that would immediately occur to a South African: bring the losers into a national unity government. The idea, alien to recent American history, comes from deeply divided countries, where all segments of the population must feel represented at government's highest levels in order to abide by the will of the majority. If the South Africans don't make it to the Kremlin to propose it themselves, maybe U.S. officials should tell the Russians that our winner-take-all political system is not best suited for them. It would be an act of character.

**PETER BEINART**



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# Where We Stand

By Albert Shanker, President
American Federation of Teachers

## "Lots of Bull but No Beef"

If people made fortunes with their schemes for reforming the schools, we'd have a healthy crop of school-reform millionaires. Year after year, new proposals appear. Some get enough support to be put into practice. But then, sooner or later, they disappear, leaving the schools substantially unchanged. This story of education reforms that come and go is not even a new one, as Stanley Pogrow, a professor at the University of Arizona, points out in his upcoming article, "Reforming the Wannabe Reformers" (*Phi Delta Kappan*, June 1996).

During the 1960s and 1970s, Pogrow reminds us, open classrooms and community-based education were at the cutting edge of school reform. In those days, we also heard that performance contracting would significantly improve student achievement and that decentralization was the answer to the problems of the New York City schools. Decentralization is probably the only one of these reforms people still recognize; after limping along for years, it is finally about to be put down. And Pogrow is pretty sure that our current favorites—"whole language, vouchers, heterogeneous grouping, teacher empowerment, authentic assessment, and team teaching"—will follow suit. (Indeed, whole language has already lost much of the support it enjoyed in the 1980s.) Some of the reforms that fail deserve to, but some promising ideas sink along with the bad ones.

What accounts for the low success rate among education reforms?

What accounts for the low success rate among education reforms? It's not that educators have a worse track record than people in other fields. Creating innovations that work and also last is very difficult. The big problem with the "reform/academic/research community" (Pogrow refers to it as REAR) is that the reforms these people come up with seldom attempt to deal with the details of classroom instruction. It's as though someone decided that a horseless carriage would be a great idea and went around selling people on it but never figured out how to make a carriage that would run without a horse.

Members of the REAR community, Pogrow says, are strong on philosophical principles and advocacy but weak on figuring out how to put their ideas into the classroom. The statement "All students can learn" may be true—I believe it is—but *what* can they learn? and *how* do we teach it so that they can learn it? Without answers to these questions, the statement is silly and empty. Pogrow cites middle school reform, with its emphasis on child-centered curricula, as an example of REAR's unwillingness to get down to brass tacks:

> Thousands of articles and speeches have advocated the development of child-centered curricula. I recently completed a three-year study to identify exemplary middle school curricula.... The only exemplary math curriculum was 20 years old.... There were no exemplary comprehensive language arts or social studies curricula. While everyone has been philosophizing about what middle school curricula should look like, no one has bothered to develop them, despite 40 years of advocacy. The basic tools that are needed aren't there; there is a lot of bull but no beef.

Pogrow calls what is needed, and usually lacking, "technology." Technology isn't just equipment; it consists of "highly specific, systematic, and structural methodologies with supporting materials of tremendously high quality"—in other words, the details for putting a theory into action and the means for doing so. The Calvert School program, which offers a carefully structured, day-by-day curriculum, complete with strategies for presenting the topics, examples and questions for teachers to use, and the necessary materials, is a "technology" in Pogrow's terms.

How can we account for the failure by members of the REAR community to create the "basic tools" their reforms need in order to work? Pogrow has a number of answers. For one thing, according to the REAR view, applying a theory should be left up to the practitioners. This sounds as though it is respectful of teacher "autonomy" and "professionalism." In fact, it is a set-up. How do you know a theory is worth anything until you grapple with the details of putting it into practice? Besides, this (conveniently) leaves all the hard work to the practitioners. As Pogrow points out,

> It is far more difficult to figure out how to implement theory than it is to generate it.... Thus it makes no sense to expect practitioners to develop their own techniques for implementing a complex reform idea.... This is not a criticism of educators. No other field expects its practitioners to develop the techniques that they practice.... In medicine, if individual practitioners invent their own procedures, we call it "malpractice."

In fact, Pogrow continues, "The equivalent of expecting teachers to develop the interventions they are going to apply [is] asking an actor to perform Shakespeare—but to write the play first."

Pogrow's point is not that the REAR community is self-indulgent or that the people who adopt its reforms are careless. He is saying that a reform proposal can only be as good as the "technology" that underpins it. And if we hope to break the cycle of reforms that fail, it's a message we must absorb.

Mr. Shanker's comments appear in this ad under the auspices of the American Federation of Teachers. Reader correspondence is invited. Address your letters to Mr. Shanker at the AFT, 555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001. © 1996 by Albert Shanker.

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